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ABSTRACT

This two-part handbook is based on 5 years of experience with distance education teaching and learning courses at the University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada). The first section, "ABC's for Tutors," looks at the tutor's responsibilities from three viewpoints: the academic duties, the administrative details, and the counselling support needed by the students, which tutors often find is a challenge to recognize and provide. Topics include setting the assignment, purposes and techniques of marking, tutorial materials, course structure, procedures and practical details, communication, and counselling. The second section, "Selected Readings," contains nine brief articles or examples of materials: (1) "Assignment Types and Intellectual Skills" (Sally B. P. Haag); (2) "Towards Good Teaching by Correspondence" (Sue Cole, Maggie Coats and Helen Lentell); (3) "Commenting on Students' Assignments" (Cheryl K. Cranley); (4) "Marking Guidelines" (Ralph Krueger) and "Letter Grades and What They Mean" (S. B. P. Haag); (5) "Adults in Teaching and Learning" (S. B. P. Haag); (6) "The Role of the Correspondence Tutor" (Roger Lewis); (7) "Counselling by Correspondence in Distance Education" (Ormond Simpson); (8) "Communicating by Phone" (Cheryl K. Cranley); and (9) "The Human Dimension in Open University Study" (Mary Thorpe and others). Each paper contains its own bibliography. Also included are a list of 8 periodicals and 18 books and articles, a fact sheet on University of Waterloo correspondence courses, and a memorandum to professors, markers, and tutors for the fall 1989 term. (DB)

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TEACHING AT A DISTANCE

Techniques for Tutors

Sally B. P. Haag
Distance Education Advisor

Published by Teaching Resources and
Continuing Education (TRACE)
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario
N2L 3G1

1990

TEACHING AT A DISTANCE:

Techniques for Tutors

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2. ***Towards good teaching by correspondence***, Coles, Coats and Lentell, *Open Learning* (1986).
3. ***Commenting on students' assignments***, Cranley, Laurentian University (1986).
4. ***a) Marking guidelines***, Ralph Krueger, Geography Department, University of Waterloo.

   b) Letter grades and what they mean, Haag, TRACE (1989).
5. ***Adults in teaching and learning***, Haag, *Distance Teaching News* (Spring 1988).
6. ***The role of the correspondence tutor***, Lewis, in *Learning at a Distance*, University of Athabasca (1982).
7. ***Counselling by correspondence in distance education***, Simpson, *Open Learning* (1988).
8. ***Communicating by phone***, Cranley, Laurentian University (1986).
9. ***The human dimension in Open University study***, Thorpe et al., *Open Learning* (1986).

APPENDIX A

Note: You will find all the sample sheets which make up Appendix A and B in the envelope inside the back cover of this book.

1. **University of Waterloo, Correspondence Courses -- Fact Sheet**
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FOREWORD

University teaching is one of the few professions where most practitioners receive no formal training in their craft. Good university teaching, whether in the classroom or by correspondence, is often picked up "on the job," and successful instructional techniques are often not shared with our colleagues. As a partial remedy for this situation five years ago Sally Haag, in collaboration with Dr. Mavis Kelly (who was visiting Waterloo from the University of Queensland External Studies Division) prepared *Teaching at a Distance: Ideas for Instructors*. This practical manual, with accompanying readings, offered some pragmatic solutions to common teaching problems faced by distance teachers. It was intended specifically for instructors in the University of Waterloo correspondence program. However, word spread, and copies of the manual have found their way to universities in various parts of the world.

In common with most distance education institutions, Waterloo employs tutor-markers, who play a seminal role in distance teaching, not only marking assignments and examinations, but answering student questions, offering suggestions, and often serving as the principal link between the student and the university. The present manual is intended for this group. It will prove useful not just for those employed as tutor-markers, but also for instructors and course authors who do their own tutoring.

The manual is published by the office of Teaching Resources and Continuing Education, which offers a variety of support services for university teachers at Waterloo -- both those involved in distance education and those engaged in live classroom teaching. Readers who would like further advice or information are warmly invited to contact the TRACE Office.

Dr. Christopher Knapper
Director of Teaching Resources and Continuing Education (TRACE)
University of Waterloo

PREFACE

This handbook has grown out of five years' experience with meeting new tutors assigned to the grading and teaching duties involved in a correspondence course. Even more important have been the nearly fifteen years of correspondence teaching that have taken up much of my concern and time as an instructor in classical studies at Waterloo.

The book consists of two major sections. Part One, 'ABC's for Tutors', looks at the tutor's responsibilities from three viewpoints: the academic duties, the administrative details, and the counselling support needed by the students and which tutors often find it a challenge to recognise and provide. Part Two, 'Selected Readings', contains nine brief articles or examples of materials which distance course authors and tutors have written. Some have been reprinted from journals of distance education, some from other tutors' handbooks such as this one.

In addition, there is a brief bibliography of books and articles in the library of the TRACE Office (Teaching Resources and Continuing Education, M.C. 4055). Also, inside the envelope attached to the back cover are a number of sample information sheets, forms and so on, currently used in connection with the Correspondence program here, and referred to in the text itself as 'Appendix A and B'.

I have deliberately used various names to describe such people as the student, the professor and the marker. So 'students' are also 'learners' or 'people in your course'; 'professors' are 'instructors' or 'course authors' or 'teachers', 'markers' are 'tutors', 'tutor-markers' or sometimes also 'teachers'. No particular significance should be attached to my use of any of these in different contexts. When I refer to 'your' instructor, assignment clerk, department, students and so on, I mean the various people with whom you will come in contact because you have been asked to tutor 'your' particular correspondence course: English 305, Computer Science 200A, French 165 or whatever it may be.

Lastly, there are numerous occasions on which you will find that the material in this handbook repeats itself. I assumed that nobody is going to read its contents from cover to cover, but to use it as a reference source when the tutoring work begins, and throughout the following four months or so, until the course is finished.

Teaching at a Distance: Techniques for Tutors is dedicated to Linnet, not because of anything she does, but because of who she is.

Sally B. P. Haag
Classical Studies and TRACE
University of Waterloo

February 1990

Part One

A B C's for Tutors

A. ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT: TUTOR AND ASSIGNMENT

A.1. Setting the assignment

As a tutor, you may have nothing to do with the setting of assignments. However, some knowledge of the theories which relate types of assessment to learning objectives may help you to mark assignments more effectively.

A.1.1. *Theories of learning objectives and assessment*

Learning objectives generally express what changes the student will undergo as a result of taking a particular course. These changes are often grouped under the three headings of knowledge, skill and attitude objectives (Kelly and Haag, 1985).

Learning at the university level is likely for most students in many courses to centre on skill objectives. Knowledge objectives are sometimes regarded as 'rote learning' and so played down, although teachers of lower level or technical courses often expect students to learn many facts and technical terms. Attitude objectives may seem in some disciplines to be encroaching on student autonomy, though such attitudes as objectivity, scholarly accuracy, acknowledgement of others' work, or scholarly honesty will likely be implicit in all courses.

Skill objectives normally resemble Bloom's (1956) hierarchy: comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation.

- Comprehension -- to restate knowledge or ideas in the learner's own words.
- Application -- to show how a theoretical principle can be applied in practice.
- Analysis -- to seek out an example of a principle, concept or theory and give a detailed account.
- Synthesis -- to draw together information from disparate sources and relate it to a particular issue.
- Evaluation -- to make a judgement based on understanding and synthesis of the evidence available.

More specific skill objectives may include such items as these.

- Exposition -- to explain clearly and elegantly (in the appropriate medium: scholarly prose, arithmetical symbols, diagrams, etc.) the material the learner wants to present.
- Deduction -- to formulate a general theory from a knowledge of many details of evidence.
- Citation of evidence -- to prove or demonstrate an argument or thesis in terms appropriate to the discipline.

- Objective judgement -- to show balanced and judicious appreciation of all aspects of an argument or hypothesis.

- Aesthetic response -- to show sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of an artifact, theorem or literary work.

- Control of material -- to use and cite from large amounts of data with appropriate selectivity.

- Problem-solving -- to speculate and hypothesize productively so as to reach plausible solutions to perceived problems.

- Logical argument -- to discuss and debate a topic without logical flaws in the structure of thought.

- Statistical analysis -- to collect and manipulate large amounts of data using correct statistical techniques.

While all course assignments are intended to test students' developing skills in a general sense, you may find that the assignments your course author/instructor has written do not explicitly refer to any expressed objectives. It is a good idea for you to discuss the knowledge, skill and attitude objectives of each of the course assignments with your instructor to arrive at a clear understanding of what you will be looking for when you mark your students' work.

Generally you will find that short answer and objective ('wrong' or 'right' only) questions tend to test knowledge of facts, while essays or projects or problems or case studies require comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis or evaluation of knowledge. An easy rule of thumb suggests that if the assignment asks the learner to *remember* something, it is responding to knowledge objectives. If it asks the learner to *use* or *do* something, it is responding to skill objectives. If it asks the learner to *express personal feelings* about something, it is responding to attitude objectives.

Your instructor may want the students to demonstrate a certain level of competence in one or more of the specific skill objectives listed above. You can discuss these with your instructor as well.

To sum up, you will find marking assignments a more satisfying job when you have acquired a good idea of what sort of knowledge, skills or attitudes the assignment seems to demand from the learner.

A.1.2. *Types of assignment*

A rapid and informal survey of course outlines on file in the University of Waterloo Correspondence Office reveals that assignment types are widely various:

- Essays on an assigned topic

- Essays without any assigned topic, but with guidance on a required approach ("a study of characters in any of the texts," "on an economic aspect of not less than a 50 year period" etc.)

- Language exercises: translation, questions, dialogues to complete, descriptions, filling in blanks -- many varieties here
- Samples, slides, photos, diagrams, data, maps are provided for the student to manipulate, identify, label, interpret etc.
- Problem sets: sometimes verbal, sometimes expressed in symbols
- Case studies
- Observational studies, using techniques taught in the course, on data provided in articles or monographs or on data collected by the student
- Identifications of important concepts, terms, events etc.
- Book reviews or reports
- Designs, maps, illustrations, or other graphic materials produced by the student
- Journals recording personal observations
- Packages of evidential materials (facsimiles of manuscripts, newspaper cuttings, photos etc.) from which students must analyse and re-construct an event
- Multiple choice and other objective short answer questions.

Since you as tutor are certainly going to be working with material which you are generally, if not specifically, familiar with, the type of assignment ought to be one you have been used to from your own student days. If its format is new and unusual, you will no doubt want to talk about it with your instructor before you begin marking. In any case, you need to decide not only what the 'right' answers to the assignment are (if any), but also what kinds of new knowledge, skills or attitudes the assignment is intended to develop or to test. (***Reading One, Assignment types and intellectual skills***, may give you some ideas -- try filling out the blank matrix before looking at the one that's been completed.)

A word of caution. The assignment type may be one that you are so familiar with that you have long forgotten when you first encountered it. Remind yourself that it may be entirely strange, even disturbing, to your students. Some of them may not have written a formal essay for forty years. Some may be learning to interpret a map or a graph for the first time. Some may never have consciously practised the skills of logical analysis, objective observation, aesthetic judgement or whatever this challenging assigned task demands.

In every case, your students are *learners*. They would not be taking the course if they were already proficient in the material it contains, and they very often need to learn proficiency in the techniques used in your discipline as well: ABC's to you, novel hieroglyphics to many of them! Be prepared patiently to explain and to demonstrate by example how to master the needed techniques, either individually or in the first tutorial if there appears to be a widespread problem. *Never* belittle misguided attempts. Nor is this the place for your witty tongue, which may easily be misinterpreted. Offer instead some genuinely sympathetic help so that the learner can develop the new skills quickly.

A.1.3. *Instructor's (course author's) role*

Normally the instructor is also the course author of the materials you are working with. Your responsibilities as a tutor may vary considerably depending upon your instructor.

- You may be marking some or some parts of the assignments under direct supervision and guidance from your instructor without any responsibility for tutorial materials.
- You may be responsible for all marking and preparation of tutorial materials, following some preliminary discussion with your instructor.
- You may be teaching the course without any contact at any stage with the instructor.

In other words, your role may range from considerable dependence on a closely supervising instructor ('marking' the course) to complete independence from the course author ('teaching' the course). Occasionally you may consult with or be supervised by a departmental officer or instructor who is not the author of the course materials. Frequently you will be expected to be responsible for all or most of the teaching activities -- marking, advising or counselling, preparing tutorial materials, grading exams, submitting final grades -- associated with the course, with the instructor/course author as a consultant ('tutoring' the course).

A.1.4 *Tutor's relationship to instructor*

It is important for you as tutor to be clear from the outset precisely what your responsibilities are when you are assigned to a course. You should discuss with the instructor and/or the departmental officer assigning the course such questions as these.

- Am I to act as marker, tutor or teacher to the students in this course?
- Am I to mark under the close supervision of my instructor?
- Am I to decide how to mark assignments from my own good judgement or will detailed guidance, a marking scheme, an answer key etc., be provided?
- Am I to introduce myself to the students as their marker, tutor or teacher, indicating to them the extent of my responsibilities towards them?
- Am I to prepare tutorial materials? If so, what will these include (tutorial tape, model solutions, answer keys etc.) ?
- Am I to answer all the students' enquiries, as their teacher naturally expects to do, or pass them all on to my instructor (unless the answer is within my competence, as marker, to provide)?

You should expect as a tutor to formulate, with or without your instructor's help, a clear understanding of the learning objectives of each assignment. Ask yourself (or your instructor or your fellow-tutors) what evidence of new knowledge, skills, insights or attitudes acquired by the learner you will be looking for in his or her assignment. You must also decide how much weight

you are going to put on various aspects or sections of the assignment if your instructor has not given you detailed guidance on how to assess the work. Lastly, you should give considerable thought to the purposes of marking.

A.2. Purposes of marking

Before beginning to mark your first set of assignments, it is a good idea to think for a while about the purposes of marking. Do these include something more than just underlining or circling mistakes? What will the student learn from your comments on his or her work? Why do you need to assign a grade? What role does assessment play in the teaching and learning process?

A.2.1. *Accreditation*

Many -- *not* all -- of your students will be taking courses to obtain a degree (or diploma or certificate in some cases). Obviously, the University has the responsibility for deciding whether its students meet the standards it sets for professional or academic competence. It is assisted and advised in this activity by the various Faculties, Departments, Schools and so on, whose instructors are often deeply concerned with maintaining what to students sometimes seem to be the rather arbitrary and abstract standards of the discipline or profession.

You should be aware that some of your students will be more interested in the grades they receive than in the course content itself, because their goal is to become accredited as fast and efficiently as they can. Some, on the other hand, will not be much interested in the grades at all, because their goal centres on self-development in a more abstract way, or simply because their intellectual curiosity is very high. Between these two extremes lies a wide range of students whose interest in their grades and the course content is more or less balanced or shifts one way or the other while they are studying. The accreditation seekers may 'grade-grub': complain that you have not assigned them a high enough grade, or dispute your marking scheme. The self-developers are less likely to complain, but may occasionally not send in an assignment at all, send it late or feel free to alter its specifications to suit their own interests and needs.

If you sometimes feel distaste for the whole business of grading leading to certification, remind yourself that your assessment is unlikely to form more than a very small part of the complex cumulative process of accreditation (each course typically forms only one-thirtieth of a general degree program here, for example). Your errors in judgement, if they do occur, are not likely to be as significantly damaging to the student's academic career progress as you fear!

Since assigning grades to students' work is a required part of the job of tutoring, develop an approach which you feel is as professionally competent as you can make it, so that you don't have to feel defensive about 'judging people' in some arbitrary way. Your job as a tutor is to judge the success of their work, *not* their success as people. Your responsibility is to judge the work fairly, objectively and consistently, so you must develop your skills in assessment conscientiously. Constructing a careful marking scheme as you begin on a set of assignments is one good way to do this (see A.3.1). Above all, make sure you could explain and justify your assignment of grades to either your student or your instructor in a sensible non-defensive way.

Furthermore, since explaining how the grade has been arrived at is recommended as good

tutoring practice, you may find you want to do so in your tutorial materials or even on at least some individual students' assignments.

A.2.2. *Evaluation*

An important aspect of marking is its evaluative function. A good tutor will have in mind during marking the evaluation of the students' current level of knowledge, of their progress in the course, or of where their strengths and weaknesses may lie. You may want after the first assignment to recommend at once some remedial approach (to consult a style manual, for example, or even to take another course at a basic level first).

Evaluation may extend from the students' work to the course materials. Widely repeated student errors or misconceptions usually point to an inadequate (vague, muddled, sketchy or too advanced, for example) section of the tapes, notes or textbook. An assignment may have been poorly worded, resulting in confused responses from the students. In these cases you can be helpful to your instructor or course author in improving the materials. You can also help your students by discussing the difficulty in the tutorial tape or sheets.

By the last assignment in the course you should be able to provide your students with brief evaluative summaries of their progress. Suggestions as to further courses, a statement of new knowledge, skills or insights successfully mastered, some guidance about areas which still need care and attention will all be helpful. Some tutors like to include the 'term mark' or proportion of the final grade already achieved, as well as some individualized advice on the exam at this final stage. ("Have you cleared up your misunderstanding of topic X since you had difficulties with it in Assignment Three? Perhaps you should allow a little extra review time on it before the final exam. Try rereading Chapter 2 and listen once again to Tutorial Three to make sure you have it straight.") You will find that a short (1/2 to 1 page), individually evaluative note enclosed with each student's last assignment will be of substantial use and special encouragement. (However, send this no later than Time Slot Five if it is to reach your students before the exam.)

A.2.3. *Motivation*

Encouragement is a vital part of marking to increase students' motivation. It is only too easy to slip into a pattern of error correction until the recognition of correct or successful material is just taken for granted. Don't let yourself begin to see only the mistakes (good advice in any human relationship, one would think!)

Many adult students are still novices at post-secondary formal education. Many are very sensitive to anything they perceive as inadequacy or failure on their part. So you must ensure that your criticism is as positive, constructive and helpful in tone as you can make it. (See A.3.3 and A.4.2 for suggestions.) Some experienced tutors give the good news first, and then as little of the bad news as they feel they must. Some prefer to discuss the ways to improve the work first, then to conclude with encouragement and congratulations on what has been done well. If cleaning up errors and straightening out misconceptions can be presented to your students as a sort of essential house-cleaning of their work, an ongoing process all creative learners expect to carry out, perhaps these activities will be less threatening to them.

In contrast, many of your students may by now be thoroughly experienced distance learners. Some will ask you to help them to improve their English usage or their technique for writing up

data and so on, and they will not be satisfied with too gentle handling! It's a good idea to remind yourself frequently that a challenging but encouraging response to an assignment is an excellent way to motivate your student to continue to study and learn. Above all, be constructive, never destructive, in your criticism, tempering your tone with even greater care where you believe you are dealing with a less experienced learner.

Try to treat your students as far as you possibly can as individuals. You won't accomplish this simply by a rather facile use of given names in assignment critiques. If you have time to do so, make a 3 x 5 card for each student. At first you will only have a given name and home town, perhaps, to put on each card (see the backs of the assignment envelopes for this information). Later on in the course you may be able to add more details ("native tongue Spanish," "has six kids," "majoring in History," "needs lots of encouragement"). You might try adding some final encouraging comment and mailing the cards out to your students with their last assignments. If your course materials already include a biographical sheet, these will be excellent substitutes for the cards. Experience suggests that about half to two-thirds of the sheets will be sent in as a rule. Some courses have a bit of personal information as a component of the assignments ("Your discussion of this problem should include some details of its impact on your own adolescence" etc.). In any case, you should try to visualize each student as a 'real' person, not just a surname and ID number. The result will certainly be noticeable, if intangible, and your students will feel that you have at least some personal commitment to helping them reach their learning goals.

Always introduce yourself to your students. The first tutorial may be the most appropriate opportunity for this. Be natural in telling them a little bit about yourself, your academic background, your plans for tutoring the course, a few personal details. Being friendly does not mean being what feels awkwardly over-informal to you. Find a tone which feels right for your personality, not too formal and not too 'buddy-buddy', and stay with it. (One tutor suggested that she marked each student's assignments as though they were her cousin's or her next door neighbour's.) Of course, always remember to sign your name at the end of an assignment analysis sheet or a critique of a problem set. (Many tutors find that a good choice is given name in full plus initial of last name, e.g. "Sally H.".)

Let your own interest and enthusiasm show. We all know that an enthusiastic teacher is a first-class motivator for us to want to learn something new. If you can convey warmth, excitement and a personal involvement with your discipline, your students too will become more highly motivated, especially when they feel that you are also turned on by the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with others interested in learning more.

A.2.4. *Teaching*

Marking assignments provides an opportunity to teach as well. Through the exchange of factual details or ideas, new approaches to the course material can open up to the student. Your analysis of a problem can serve as a model teaching tool, too, since it will show the learner how to think about similar questions. If you obviously take the trouble to distinguish with precision between two subtly different technical terms, you are again providing a role model in an essential scholarly technique. Whatever you believe to be the hallmarks of scholarship in your discipline, accuracy, impartiality, logical debate and so on, you should model for your students, even if the time-pressure of marking means that you cannot demonstrate your points at much length.

The marking and tutorial aspects of course presentation provide you with a last chance to

reteach whatever material seems to have been less effectively presented or less well understood. If your own ideas do not match your instructor's precisely, there's no need to hide the fact. You can discuss them, re-presenting them for greater clarity before commenting on your own somewhat different viewpoint or interpretation, ending with an invitation to the students to come to their own conclusions, where appropriate. In any case, be careful never to hold your students up as hostages in any developing conflict between your point of view and the course author's. (See C.4.1)

To summarize, your comments on students' assignments should as often concern themselves with process as with product, and should themselves be examples of the scholarly process in action: objective, analytical and -- as far as possible -- elegant!

Reading Two, Towards good teaching by correspondence, presents arguments to show that correspondence tuition is not simply a matter of marking or correcting students' work but is a major teaching medium, and its authors suggest that a relationship must be established with the student within which teaching and learning can take place.

A.3. Techniques of Marking

The details of how you, as a tutor for a particular course in a specific discipline, will mark your students' work are most likely going to differ from anyone else's. Even objective marking has (and perhaps should have) its own idiosyncratic approach -- *your* approach! There are several general rules, however, which apply to all distance teaching and learning marking situations. As a good tutor you will soon find that you will always do well to

- make clear to yourself before or as you begin to mark what you are looking for in your students' responses to the assignment. Sometimes this will be made easier by preparing a detailed marking scheme. (See A.3.1.)
- remember that the feedback you give on assignments is probably the only contact your students have with another specialist in the discipline, so take your time to be thorough
- adopt a positive and constructive tone for your comments
- avoid sarcastic or belittling remarks at all costs. (If you cannot do this without developing unpleasant stress reactions, save your health and sanity and quit teaching!)
- be as clear as you can. Write clearly. Explain clearly.
- challenge the best students as much as you support the weak ones
- check your marking as you finish each assignment. (Have you made at least half as much comment on what is well or correctly done as you have in correcting errors or pointing out weaknesses?)
- make a point of directing your students towards the right answer or the right approach, after (or even better, before) telling them what they have done wrong

- 'speak' directly, informally and politely to your students. (Avoid red pen in favour of freshly sharpened, not too hard pencil. Imagine each student is your friend or your neighbour, and your peer. S/he may be thirty years older and twice as well-educated as you are!)

- invite your students' reactions to your marking techniques in your first tutorial, suggesting your willingness to individualize whenever you can ("Mary's sight is poor -- prefers black felt pen or red ink," "Pierre wants detailed help with written English," might be the sort of notes to make in your marking folder)

- share your own enthusiasm and love of learning.

A.3.1. *Constructing a marking scheme*

Some types of assignment can be quickly provided with an answer key and grading or marking scheme by you or your instructor. Others, for example essays, are less clearcut and straightforward. You will need to make a list of all the points you (and your instructor, if possible) think a competent answer should include and perhaps of any obvious errors or misunderstandings which ought *not* to appear in a good paper.

In addition you will need to

- decide whether the grade you assign will be based entirely on content or partly on format or on freedom from stylistic and grammatical faults, and so on

- decide on the relative importance of independence from (or dependence on) the textbooks or lectures

- consider how you will balance originality of ideas against, for example, unorthodoxy of presentation.

Some tutors prefer to spend some time sketching out a marking scheme, even if quite an informal one, before beginning to read the assignments at all. Others prefer to read four or five papers, jotting down the points generally being made, or noting which particularly valuable details are being missed by some of the students, and in this way getting a feel for the style and content of the answers. Then marking begins in earnest after the four or five guinea-pigs have been returned to the pile unmarked.

Another shortcut to use in later assignment sets is to select the handful of highest achievers on an earlier set. Their papers can be read through first, to establish what an ideal A paper might contain.

Some instructors expect to have a considerable amount of discussion with their tutors or markers about each assignment. (Keep notes if you are subsequently going to construct your own marking scheme.) Some may not volunteer any guidance, but will be perfectly happy to discuss marking with you, in general or specific terms, if you make an appointment to talk to them. As we've already noted, you may not be in contact with the course author/instructor at all, so that it is then up to you, as the teacher of the course, to decide how the assignments should be marked.

Whatever your situation, try to formulate for each assignment some kind of checklist of what should be included (and perhaps what should not be there). Then decide how you will rank these merits and defects, and whether any are serious enough to deserve a failure on the paper, or trivial enough to carry little or no weight in assigning the grade.

You will find that there are several rather different parts to your job as tutor when you actually have a student's assignment in one hand and your pencil in the other. The first is in-text correction of errors, another is making comments on specific details of the paper, then summarizing the success of the assignment as a whole, before suggesting some future directions and finally, assigning a grade.

A.3.2. *Correcting errors*

First, you must notice the errors in the assignment you are going to mark and correct them. There are a number of points to consider.

- Will a sheet of standardized correcting symbols (e.g. *Sp.* for spelling, *calc. x* for calculation error etc.) make your job easier? Enclose a copy with tutorial materials if so (and then remember to use the symbols!)

- Are you going to correct everything, even typos? Or are you going to ignore trivial errors and concentrate on just two or three significant problem areas, especially for a weak student?

- Are you going to underline (circle, cross out or whatever) without providing the appropriate correction? Will you guide the students to find the correct answer for themselves ("see p. 23 in your text"), or provide it for them ("1872 is the date you are after")?

- Are your corrections clear, legible, comprehensible -- and set neatly in the wide margins and alternate lines you have urged all your students to leave when typing or writing their assignments?

- Are you going to take any responsibility for their English style and grammar, or are you only looking for appropriate content?

- Is the actual appearance of your correcting non-punitive, i.e. no scarlet slashes or oversize purple x's through a student's mistakes? Some tutors suggest a light wavy line is less threatening than a heavy underlining, for example.

A.3.3. *Making comments and summarizing*

Making comments on the assignment develops naturally from your working through it. This is an aspect of tutoring which is going to need a lot of practice and sensitivity to the connotation as well as the denotation of what you write. ***Reading Three, Commenting on students' assignments***, discusses the general kinds of comments you will need to have in your repertoire as a skilled tutor-marker. Here are some points to remember.

- Always make critical comments on the work, *not* its author (e.g. "The ideas in these sentences would be more coherent, perhaps, if you presented them in the

order I've suggested (as 1, 2, 3 etc.)" *Not* "You aren't thinking clearly here" or -- worse still "You're incoherent -- sloppy thinking!")

- Always be upbeat, positive and constructive, *not* sarcastic, cryptic or destructive (e.g. "Your difficulties with analysing data are still getting in your way, but you are obviously tackling them with vigour -- well done! Have you looked closely at the tables and the discussion of them on pp. 140-143 in Smith [the textbook]? Try breaking down the raw figures as she suggests there. Can you see how they can then be more easily compared? *Not* "Data analysis meaningless here. Don't cook your figures!" or "Statistical techniques very poor!")

- Single word comments are generally of little use, whether congratulatory or crushing. If you write "Good!" or even "Great!," it is certainly more encouraging than "No!" or "Sloppy!" but the student is often still left wondering what precisely went well or wrong. Cryptic but elegant diction is more annoying than enlightening as a rule ("Sophisticated," "Vigorous," "Modest," "Dislocated") and may remind the recipient of those irritatingly incomprehensible wine-reviewers we all are familiar with.

- Make 'because' one of your favourite words ("A good transition here, because it bridges ...." "An interesting point, because it suggests ...." "Economical and elegant, because you have avoided ...." "Awkwardly arranged, because the logical order ...." "I am confused here, because (I think!) your second argument is not ....")

- After a while, your similarity to Pollyanna and your constant sweetness and light may make you feel like a hypocrite. *DON'T WORRY*! Your students (usually) see only the encouraging and helpful remarks you make on their own individual papers and they each deserve your support. They may each be the twelfth or twentieth author of "a lively and original introduction, because ...," but remember, you are only repeating yourself to YOU, not to each of them!

- It may become a fault to be too wordy, but it is a better fault, as a rule, than to be too brief in responding to distance students.

- You may find it saves a great deal of time to write just a number in the margin of the assignment. On a separate sheet jot down your comments one by one, then *staple* (not paperclip, for security) the sheet of comments to the back of the assignment, simply writing "see back" or "see comments on last sheet" against the first marginal number.

After you have made all the detailed corrections and comments you feel are needed, you still have more jobs to do. First, make a generally helpful overall comment on or summary of the assignment, focussing now on what seem to be current strengths and weaknesses of the student's work. Whenever you can, look back ("This technique has worked better for you here than in your first assignment ....") and forward ("In the next assignment, you can try expanding the approach you took to the third question here -- it's a good one!"). If you find making general comments more difficult than the specific ones, a listing approach may be simpler for you ("Points to note -- first, your strengths: (1) ..."). Now you are ready to break a little new ground with your student.

A.3.4. *Setting goals and sharing ideas*

Many of us feel that marking an assignment should be more than merely dissecting the corpse. Here are some additional responsibilities of the first-rate tutor:

- making suggestions for the next assignment (but remember that these will not be useful for the next adjacent time slot, but only for the next but one)
- asking questions about the content of the assignment in such a way as to stimulate the learner into further thought
- making comments and suggesting new ideas to involve the learner in a kind of dialogue with the course content
- recommending further interesting reading (but be careful -- many of your students may have no access, or very little, to anything beyond the course materials)
- suggesting new activities or new applications for the knowledge and skills being learned
- sketching out new directions for the learner to go and showing how these relate to or develop from the course content
- advising the student about ways to tackle specific weaknesses and perhaps helping him or her set up an individual remedial program
- giving some tips on study skills, where these seem likely to be helpful
- answering any questions which the student has asked, and most importantly of all, perhaps,
- responding, no matter how briefly, to EVERY personal note, message or query which the student has sent you ("Joe, thanks for warning me your next assignment may be late -- Sally H.," "Thanks Mary, for the newspaper cutting -- as you'll hear, I've quoted from it in the tutorial ...." or even "Congratulations, Dick -- how is the new baby doing now?"). Good tutors know that acknowledging *all* the gestures of contact and *all* the questions means a great deal to distance learners, so they never neglect even the smallest postscript!

A.3.5. *Assigning a grade*

Finally, the last job to do before you return the assignment to the pile already marked is to assign a grade. If you are marking to a fairly objective, cut and dried scheme, this may not be too hard. For many tutors, though, assigning the grade is the worst part. ("Should I give a C+ or a B-? Maybe a C++? Maybe a 69%? Or is that much *too* precise -- how could I justify 69, and not 68 or 70?"). Here are some suggestions which may be helpful, but ultimately you are going to have to reach your own decisions (at first you will likely feel quite insecure about doing so):

- first check the course outline, in case it clearly states what kind of grading system

is to be used (see the University of Waterloo Correspondence Program's standard *Course Outline* format)

- mark out of ten or fifty or with letters -- whatever scale you feel most at ease using -- and convert as necessary
- consult with fellow tutors or your instructor
- ask your instructor whether there are any marked papers on file in your department (or ones which s/he has recently marked) for you to read and compare with your own grades
- perhaps ask your instructor to read a few pages and grade them while you do so too, and then meet to compare and discuss the grades
- glance through most or all of the assignments and separate them roughly into three or four piles on the basis of good, so-so, poor, awful, outstanding
- make a snap judgement in the first page or so as you read, then mentally continue to score plusses and minusses as you continue through the paper
- decide first on a coarse scale and then refine ("This one's definitely a C -- but is it a bit better, or a bit worse? A *bit* better, I think. O.K., then, that's a C+: 6.7, 6.8 or 6.9. Maybe a 6.7 is about right.")
- by all means avoid throwing the assignments downstairs and seeing which goes farthest, since length and expensively heavy paper don't necessarily mean quality!

For your first experience with marking you may want to read quickly through a complete set of assignments, making a rough decision before actually marking. However, this takes a tremendous amount of time, and you won't always be able to spare it. Try not to reread more papers than you must, but you may need to set some oddball or very weak ones aside for reconsideration later. Don't mark all the typewritten ones first (your patience and objectivity will deteriorate terribly after ten or a dozen handwritten ones). Try to avoid being over-influenced by a glamorous appearance, or the reverse. If you feel that the presentation is so disorganized and illegible you will have to mark it down, restrain yourself and warn the student first ("Do you think you can present your next assignment more formally/more legibly written/ on alternate lines etc.? Anything which slows your reader down too much tends to interfere with a fair assessment of your ideas, and I was tempted to give a lower grade than this paper deserves because it was so hard to follow/read/concentrate on the argument").

You may find that very weak papers go slowly, because of all the comments and corrections. A reread may be necessary to regain an overview before assigning a grade. Every five or six papers, check the one just marked against an earlier one to which you gave the same grade, and ask yourself whether your standards are going up or down. Finally, in spite of time pressures, try not to finish the forty-fifth assignment at 3 a.m. after twelve hours of marking; you won't be doing anyone's assignment any justice under those conditions. ***Reading Four, Marking guidelines*** and ***Letter grades and what they mean*** supplies some attempts at defining what various grade levels imply, but you should be aware that these are a fruitful topic among academics for extensive discussion which usually ends in agreements to differ.

A.3.6. *Special types of marking*

Some types of assignment need special marking techniques. No doubt your instructor will discuss the details with you. In each case, you are going to feel more confident of your ability to assess the students' work objectively and skilfully if you have a clear idea of what points to look for. A checklist (and if necessary a detailed marking scheme) is most useful. If you have to assess, for example, some sort of visual material (maps, drawings, script etc.), first discuss the crucial aspects of the work with your instructor, making a note of them as you talk: "evenness of line-thickness, correct indicators of natural geographic features, darkness/lightness of shading, lack of 'line-wobble', neat lettering ...". Then decide how much weight you are going to give to each item on your checklist, and draw up a marking scheme, if necessary. If you want, you can use the checklist as an assignment analysis sheet (see A.5.3), attaching a blank copy of it to each assignment before checking it off as you assess the work. Remember to leave enough blank space below the checklist for the general summative comments that you will be making.

Some special types of marking, all of which will require this discussion and checklist approach, include assessment of

- visual material
- oral material
- practical or project assignments
- personal and individualized assignments.

Oral marking will entail listening to individual tapes sent in by the student. (You may find that it takes a surprisingly long time, especially when you are recording a response rather than writing one.) You will need access to a good quality tape recorder for this job. Ask the Correspondence Office technicians (see B.4.1) to lend you a machine if necessary. After discussion with your instructor you will be able to produce a checklist as described above. When the assignment tapes reach you, be careful how you take the cassettes, one at a time, out of their envelopes. Each must be checked to see that the student wrote his or her name on the cassette (some always forget, so copy the name from the back of the envelope onto the cassette right away!). Then KEEP THE ENVELOPES! This is one of the situations where the assignment clerks in the Correspondence Office will find their job is easier if you return the marked assignment inside the envelope it came to you in, along with any other written exercises that belong to the same student. Put the student's grade on the *outside* of the envelope.

Often your individual tutorial comments will be made directly after the student's oral exercises on the tape. If you plan to respond orally in this way, make quite sure that you have listened for a minute or two *after* the exercise is completed, as occasionally the students like to speak directly to you on the tape, to ask questions or simply to chat for a few minutes. Then rewind so that your comments begin right after the student's words end. When you record your comments and messages in return, introduce yourself ("Hello, Mrs. Smith, this is Joanie McWhistle, your tutor ...."). Say goodbye at the conclusion too, whether you do it formally or informally ("Well, that's it for now, Mike. Talk to you again in a couple of weeks." "Good work, then, Mrs. Smith. This is Joanie signing off.") If you feel very awkward, just imagine you are talking on the phone to a friend. Better still, play around with a blank tape for an hour or two before you have to start making a tape in earnest.

Practical or project assignments can be best handled by the checklist approach. Details of an assignment of this type are likely to be unique and your instructor will certainly familiarize you with your responsibilities in such a case. No matter what form these projects take, first make sure the student's name is clearly marked on his or her work.

Personal or individualized assignments may give you a little more difficulty, because you won't always be confident of the appropriateness of each student's choice of topic, and each assignment is new and different. However, again a checklist is your best ally, even if it has to be worded in a rather general way and has to include the suitability of the topic as one of the assessment categories.

You may occasionally be asked to assess learners' work without assigning a grade, or on a pass/fail system only. Another possibility is partial or selective marking of assignments, in which certain sections, for example, are corrected in detail, others are not.

In any case, your golden rules are two.

- Discuss the assessment task in considerable detail with your instructor beforehand (take some notes!)
- Make yourself a checklist (and a fully detailed marking scheme if necessary) to ensure that you approach each learner's work with the same objectives in mind and that your standards stay the same.

A.3.7. *Students' likes and dislikes*

Over the years of experience in distance education which Waterloo has acquired, there's been quite an accumulation of informally (sometimes *very* informally) expressed students' opinions about the courses they have liked or disliked, and why.

Out of a random assortment of such opinions, here's a profile of a course and its author and tutor (sometimes the same, often different people), which tries to represent what our students seem to want.

Course materials

The course materials should have clearly presented notes (not handwritten) and any visual aids should be well related to the course content. It goes without saying that all the basics of good course design must be there:

- information about the course structure
- which lectures should be covered for each of the assignments and the type of exam
- a reading or study guide and selective bibliography
- clear guidance about how to prepare and present assignments (and about their length) and assignment questions which are specific but open-ended enough to encourage creativity

- lecture notes which have a clear structure, point headings, plenty of space for additional notes and which start each lecture's notes on a new page, with the lecture title and contents at the top
- some self-assessment questions
- some notes on "pulling it all together"
- some sample answers and exam questions and keys or solutions to any problems or questions in the textbook or the lecture notes
- lectures which neither contain too much material nor present it too fast
- a biography of the course author and the tutor, including a photograph and instructions on how and when to contact these people.

Lastly, the course author should provide a clear overview of the course at the outset (and of subunits when each is introduced), use a conversational style, set assignments which are of reasonable length (and avoid Slot Six, universally disliked because it does not return the last assignment before the final exam), set three or four shorter assignments rather than one or two longer ones (because of the chance they provide for improvement through practice), and select more than one text book provided that they are useful, integrated with the other course materials and not prohibitively expensive.

Course Author

The author of these course materials is a highly-skilled professional, our students say. She or he has high professional standards and attitudes and a strong sense of sharing a respected discipline with welcome newcomers to it. A genuine personal interest in the adult learners, a clear and pleasant voice with a conversational tone, a sense of humour, all arouse an interest in the course materials. Their author conveys knowledge effectively and clearly. Explanations are detailed but easy to grasp, lectures are well organized and intellectually stimulating, and the course author encourages students to think independently and to go beyond the materials provided. While s/he has clear expectations of quality work, there is a kindly, positive and unbiased tone in the discussion of assignment topics and final exam. All in all, the most-liked course author/instructor is personable - and personal - well-organized and thought-provoking, and encourages the learner's development into independence. "He has been the toughest, yet most rewarding instructor I have encountered" writes a student, "because he has created my interest in an entirely new area."

Course tutor

The course tutor always plays a very important part in the successful learning experience. As another student writes, "it is so often factors other than the course material itself which determine the quality and value of a course. The most important is the instructor or tutor." Excellence in the discipline is essential, but so is sensitivity to the special needs of adults.

The ideal tutor is a paragon: he or she is consistent, fair, professional in standards and attitudes, encouraging but honest, unbiased, kind, positive, respectful and accepting of students' ideas, patient, personal, tolerant, appreciative, understanding and helpful. Marking

by a tutor of this sort will provide the best possible feedback, a crucial, and for most learners, central part of the learning process. This tutor or instructor

- provides clear explanations on his or her expectations and marking style
- welcomes extra questions
- "locates one's faults but corrects them kindly," says a student "and she explains *why* marks have been lost or awarded."
- makes thorough but cheerful and constructive comments (in contrast with another student's plaintive remark: "The comments left one feeling criticized, threatened and nervous.")
- gives an extra boost to encourage a student in difficulties
- clarifies points which have not been easily grasped or correctly learned
- is helpful in achieving the student's objectives
- gives an extension when it is needed
- shows a genuine interest in motivating learners (even those who are beginners and so perhaps at a less interesting stage for the teacher)
- writes all corrections legibly and at a meaningful level of detail
- above all returns marked assignments promptly.

So it seems the ideal tutor-marker or instructor (and many students do prefer the tutor who is also the course author) is the one who treats his or her students as s/he would want to be treated, who is approachable as a real person (signs the assignment comments, responds to letters and phone calls promptly and without fail) and who provides the most extensive and encouraging comments. "The extra care and time Prof. X took in marking this course have been *much* appreciated," seems a suitably positive remark to end this collection of students' ideas about the good courses and teachers they have met at Waterloo.

Your students do have the opportunity to express their opinions about each course they take. A letter and short questionnaire goes out to each of them for return after they complete the course (see the sample in Appendix B.3.). These questionnaires are returned to the course instructor (after the final grades have been submitted to the Registrar's Office). If you are interested in your students' comments, ask your instructor to pass on the questionnaires to you, or to discuss them with you, at least to the extent that they refer to your tutoring efforts.

A.4. Common marking problems

With every set of assignments you mark you are likely to meet several problem cases. These will often take up a lot of your time and concern. Some of them you can decide about for

yourself, others you will want to consult over, with still others you will need to call in a counsellor or even a University officer.

A.4.1. *Common or shared errors*

Occasionally you will find that a majority of the assignment writers are making a shared error. This suggests either an awkwardly set assignment question, a poorly presented section of notes or lectures, or a textbook error. In any case, try to locate the source of the problem and inform your instructor about it so that it can be straightened out before the course is offered again. Then do what you can to set the problem right by discussing it in your tutorial material. (By all means explain there that many students in the class found topic x difficult.)

Much more frequently you will encounter similar errors being made by enough of the students that you can save time by referring each of them to a tutorial sheet or tape in which you will go over the difficulties in detail. (Be careful not to forget to include the material in the tutorial, or you will face a flood of enquiries!)

If you find that mistakes occur in assignments in the early time slots on points which are of basic importance throughout the course, it is worth taking the time to prepare a thorough and precise explanation or definition, preferably with two or three examples of correct use. You can enclose these explanations with the first tutorial.

Because distance students have such restricted opportunities to check their ideas out with their teacher or their fellow students, you must make all your explanations or comments as clear, full, comprehensible and simply expressed as you can. This is especially true when you are correcting errors which recur frequently in the assignments you are reading.

A.4.2. *How to 'fail' an assignment*

Nobody enjoys failure. Equally, no tutor likes having to fail a student's assignment, particularly a distance learner's, whose reactions to the unpleasant fact cannot be predicted or buffered. Here are some ways in which experienced tutors suggest that a failing assignment should be handled.

- First assignments should be much more tactfully and gently dealt with than later ones.

- No failing grade need be written on the paper at all. Some supportive explanatory comments are attached, giving the reasons why the work is "not yet at the level expected in this course" or "not the appropriate approach" or "not yet polished/error-free/clearly expressed enough to receive a satisfactory mark" etc. Then permission is given to rework and resubmit the assignment. (Send a covering note to the assignment clerk in the Correspondence Office.)

- If it is impossible to handle the extra work of resubmitted assignments, perhaps some readjustment of the grades can be made (e.g. the first assignment can carry only 5% instead of the original 10%, and a later one an extra 5% to make up). You will have to ask for the student's agreement to do this, of course.

- Write a letter (or phone, if the case seems to warrant it) explaining to the student

why the marked assignment will be a disappointment. If you write at once, your letter will probably reach the student a day or two before the disaster returns.

- Try to soften the blow in any way that you reasonably can. Be humane but just. Find phrases which say what you must say, but are as little likely to hurt as possible. Fail the work, not the person!

- Always suggest carefully how the work (or the next assignment) can be improved. Make positive comments on any good points, of course, and show how some faults, if well-controlled, can be turned to good advantage ("A scholarly essay just can't accommodate this extent of personal emotion. However, here is a way in which your wealth of personal experience *can* be valuably put to work for you: ...").

- Give the learner an excuse if you can. "Did you perhaps not have enough time to ...," "Did you find the concept of x particularly difficult to grasp?" "Sorry about the poor results here; do you think you were back to studying too soon after the illness/move/family problems/extra workload you mentioned in your note?"

- For a later assignment, remind the student of an earlier successful one, suggesting s/he had an all too human 'bad day', along with some review or other remedial work which can be done to improve the learner's grasp of the newer topic.

- Two things need to occur for each of us to make best use of failure: a renewal of determination to meet the challenge and a real understanding of what went wrong. So in returning failing work, you must give both encouragement and hope, and a full explanation of the failure.

- A big fat A is fine on the top front of the assignment. A small and humble D or F can quite properly be written on the last page, and perhaps can be kept within the body of the comments anyway. (Again, a detachable note to the assignment clerk can be pinned to the front.)

- Ask your instructor or a fellow tutor to read over a failing paper. A second opinion may be valuable.

- Above all, put yourself in your student's shoes -- be as empathetic as you know how!

A.4.3. *Inappropriate work*

Occasionally tutors encounter assignments which for one reason or another are partially or even totally inappropriate. In these cases you should try to develop a sixth sense about what they may mean. Consultation with your instructor, fellow tutors or departmental faculty may be, as in dealing with failing papers of a more usual sort, the best first step in deciding how you should proceed.

Various types of inappropriate work include

- an off-topic assignment (usually an essay on a topic quite different from those assigned). Possible significance: plagiarism, a bought/'borrowed' assignment,

double submission, an over-self-assertive learner, a student with an obsessive or compulsive interest (the first three are academic offences -- see A.4.4.)

- An unusually advanced assignment (often very good but too long and with an extensive bibliography and footnotes). Possible significance: plagiarism, a bought assignment, an outstanding student.

- A far too short assignment. Handwriting may be extremely laborious, poor or distorted. Typing may be very amateurish. Format may be tabular, or in short-note rather than essay style. Possible significance: a very weak student (possibly unsuited at present to university-level work), misunderstanding of requirements, a disabled student (if you suspect the assignment may belong to the last of these, you should call or visit the Co-ordinator of Services for Disabled Persons, Florence Thomlison, Ext. 4635, NH 2051 *before taking any further action.* The exam co-ordinator in the Correspondence Office also keeps a list of correspondence students who have reported disabilities).

- An assignment with unusually serious flaws (very numerous spelling errors, an apparent difficulty in copying or manipulating numbers correctly, serious logical or organizational problems etc.). Possible significance: a very weak student, a learning disabled student ('perceptually handicapped') - again, consult Florence Thomlison, Ext. 4635, NH 2051 before proceeding.

- An assignment which seems completely independent of either the visual or the aural course materials. Possible significance: a partially sighted/blind or hearing disabled student.

- An assignment which cannot be completed properly because it requires some input from community or environment. Possible significance: a bed-ridden, shut-in, or incarcerated student.

- An assignment with an hysterical or fanatical tone (often in repetitive, denunciatory, over-personal, 'doomsday', or inflammatory style). Possible significance: a student with a mental or emotional disorder.

In each case, if you are for some reason (even if you cannot put your finger on it) uneasy at the distinctly peculiar assignment in front of you, you are safe to do two things.

- Say and do nothing at all in response to the student until you have thought over the possibilities and sought advice.

- Seek advice from your instructor, or a departmental adviser or officer, or from your Faculty's Associate Dean, or from the Co-ordinator of Services for Disabled Persons, or from the Distance Education Adviser or others in the TRACE Office or the Correspondence Office. *Someone* will have seen your kind of problem before!

Above all, *don't* fire off a hasty and perhaps imprudently worded response to your student. Proceed with caution and tact. This is the one time when a delay in returning an assignment is fully justified.

A.4.4. *Plagiarism and other academic offences*

Some tutors suspect plagiarism lurks behind every tree to ambush them. Others never suspect it at all ("I'm really surprised s/he did so poorly on the exam -- the assignments were always so well done!"). Without developing paranoia about plagiarism, we should remember that it is a serious academic offence and it is our responsibility to help prevent its occurrence. This may include for a tutor a certain amount of detective work.

You might consider the possibility of some degree of plagiarism when

- the assignment is wholly or partially off-topic, particularly when parts of it are very well, even professionally, written but are not quite appropriate to the context
- the style of the assignment is oddly uneven or varied
- the assignment has an air of familiarity, of vague *déjà vu*
- the assignment is at a level which is more typical of graduate than undergraduate work: excessive numbers of footnotes, bibliographic references to scholarly journals, apparent familiarity with high-level aspects of the discipline
- two assignments are submitted which show a great degree of similarity, especially shared errors.

Since there are innocent explanations for all of these, you must proceed with considerable caution. If you can do so, first check the references (footnotes, endnotes) given in the assignment for correctness. If the footnotes are not appropriate at all, but appear to have been randomly selected to dress up the assignment, you will be forced to conclude that some sort of deception is being attempted. However, be sure that there isn't just an error in numbering -- the accidental loss of two references early in the transcription process, for example, can lead to all later references being out of kilter. Occasionally a different edition of the text may be the source of the discrepancies.

You may find that the references provided are only too accurate: the material in the assignment has been taken systematically (word for word) from the original source without quotation marks or any clear statement that the original material is simply being reproduced. This poses more of a puzzle. Why apparently plagiarize from a published source, and then supply all the needed signposts in the form of correct references? We can assume here that a serious misconception of how to present quoted material has occurred. You can insert some examples of the correct punctuation, making a clear explanation of what must be done to remove any suspicion of an attempt to plagiarize, and return the assignment ungraded for complete correction. Grade it only when it is returned in the correct form. (An attached note to your assignment clerk will be useful.)

'Patchwork-quilt' or 'cut-and-paste' essays are fairly commonly met with. These prove to be more or less correctly referenced collections of paragraphs excerpted from course texts or elsewhere, with almost no connective tissue written by the student independently. Generally these are not attempts at deception, but a complete misunderstanding of the essay-writing process. They require very careful, perhaps rather simply expressed diagnosis and assistance. Quote part of one of the borrowed paragraphs, surround it with authorial comment or analysis,

present it clearly indented and correctly referenced, and use it as an example of how the student ought to be approaching writing the assignment. Of course, any second assignment showing the same defects can be more sternly treated. There ought to be a visible attempt to correct the problem.

If few or no references are supplied, yet your sixth sense is uneasy, you can start a literature search, basing it on any clues in the student's bibliography, if one is provided. (An essay with no footnotes or bibliography should in any case have been returned at once, ungraded, to the student, with a request for the proper documentation. Remember the covering note to your assignment clerk!) Here are some common sources to check:

- the texts provided for the course or recently used for the same course but now replaced
- other texts in common use in your discipline, particularly those currently or recently used in other courses taught in your department
- the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or other standard encyclopaedias likely to be in public libraries
- well known popular books (e.g. Book Club choices) or magazines (e.g. *Psychology Today*) related to your discipline
- other texts by the author of one of the course texts
- books recommended by or listed in the bibliographies of the course texts.

Above all, if you suspect plagiarism but cannot substantiate your suspicions, you should take the following steps:

- consult your instructor (or other departmental officer or faculty member)
- do *not* make any direct charges to your student, though a note to explain a delay in returning the work "while I check out some of your references further" is in order.

When, as sometimes happens, you and your instructor agree that plagiarism seems probable but cannot be substantiated, any comments you make should be very carefully worded. Use such phrases as "seems very derivative," "appears to rely heavily on the standard texts," "sounds rather unoriginal". Ask for the source of the ideas. But don't sound as though you are making accusations!

Some general information about academic offences and related problems.

- Double submission (handing in the same work for two different course assignments) is an offence, *unless* by prior permission.
- Files are kept on known cases of offences and it is your duty to report any clearcut case to your department officers or Associate Dean of your Faculty, who will advise you how you should proceed. Do *not* contact the student yourself until advised to do so.

- Bought work is an offence -- and hard to detect or prove.

- Shared work (the same assignment handed in by two different people) first needs bringing out into the open ("I see you two are working together, so that I shall assign the same grade to each of you, if that's what you want. But remember that you will both be on your own for the final exam. You'll have to take care that you can both work equally well without your partner"). Then perhaps encourage studying cooperatively, but writing individual assignments.

- Keep a xeroxed copy of any plagiarized (or seriously suspected) assignment.

- Make a habit of consulting your instructor, if you can, at least at first, about the remarkably good and bad assignments, as well as about the 'oddballs'.

- Any assignment which comes in late and sounds/reads as though it has been done or improved with the assistance of the tutorial materials may of course have actually been so helped (friends, relatives and neighbours may be taking the course and submitting *their* assignments on time!) Perhaps you can do little about the late assignment except to attach a note saying that you will be unable to grade any further late work.

- You can at least hope -- and tactfully suggest, if necessary -- that your instructor changes the course assignments regularly. You are not likely to pick out any assignment corrected in an earlier year and now resubmitted!

- Nobody has any data as far as I know on how many distance students' assignments are not done in good faith. Certainly a few are not. Even more certainly, most are. Always assume you are dealing with inappropriate or inexperienced work unless you can *prove* it to be an attempt to deceive, and make your first response a move to teach and to help. Never accuse until you have the arm of the law behind you (probably in the form of an Associate Dean) and incontrovertible evidence in your possession -- and then, no doubt, the Dean will do it for you!

- Lastly, don't waste your valuable time in over-lengthy searches of the literature. Equally, don't be naive and gullible. There is a happy medium in detecting academic offences, as in all things.

A.5. Tutorial materials

When you return your students' graded assignments, you will generally want to send them some tutorial materials as well. These will be tapes, answer keys, samples or model answers, assignment analysis sheets, or sometimes further teaching materials. Your instructor may provide some or all of these, or s/he may expect you to do so. Occasionally you may be tutoring a course without any direct guidance as to your responsibilities. In that case, think of yourself as tutor-teacher, and decide for yourself exactly what kinds of tutorial support you are going to provide.

A.5.1. *Tutorial tapes*

There are several types of tutorial tape:

- pre-made by your instructor as part of the prepared course materials. These tapes may be included in the original course package with instructions for their use in association with one or more of the assignments. As a rule these tapes provide answers to or a discussion of a self-assessment assignment rather than one which is to be handed in

- more commonly, pre-made tutorial tapes which are simply sent out when marked assignments are returned. Tutors whose courses contain pre-made tutorial tapes should have copies of these. You will certainly want to listen to any pre-made tutorials before deciding how to mark the set of assignments or what other tutorial materials to send out with them

- a student-specific tutorial tape prepared as a direct response to an individual assignment which has just been marked. This is often recorded immediately after the student's assessment or on the other side of a blank tape included in the original course package for the student to use in submitting oral assignments or, more informally, in asking questions, communicating ideas or 'introducing' him or herself (for techniques of marking oral assignments, see A.3.6)

- a general tutorial tape prepared after a set of assignments has been marked. This is the commonest type and the one you are most likely to be asked (or to decide for yourself) to make.

What sort of thing will you need to put in a general tutorial tape? First decide what other kinds of tutorial material, if any, you will be using, such as an answer key, a model answer, samples of the students' work etc. Then work out a quick plan for the tape. In a first tutorial you may want to do some or all of these:

- introduce yourself (as a minimum, "Hello everyone in LAFF 232, I'm Joanie McWhistle, your tutor")

- tell the class something about the group ("At least one student from each province, forty-five in the group, three from Goose Bay, half men, half women, average age 34, sixteen gym teachers, two air traffic controllers, six without any previous experience of distance education ... etc. etc.")

- tell something about your own academic background (not too much or you may terrify some of them. Others may wonder whether you will know enough to help them at all!)

- tell them about your hopes and plans for tutoring them and encourage them to contact you with their questions (explain how and when, and promise to respond to *all* phone calls and answer *all* letters)

- ask them if you may refer to or quote from their work, and ask them to let you know if they prefer you not to (explain that you will use this form, for protection of privacy: "Joe from Kenora" or "Susie Q. from Stratford")

- discuss the details of the assignment (you will have been jotting down any points that you thought needed to be dealt with in the tutorial as you worked through the marking) as well as making some summative comments about the assignment topics as a whole

- summarize the overall grade picture (fairly casually is thought by many to be the best approach: "Half a dozen in the A range, twice that in the B's, twenty or so C's. The handful of weaker ones have all got some especially detailed comments and suggestions on their papers, so I hope things will go better for them on Assignment 3").

- congratulate three or four of the very good (or not so good but with some witty point, original suggestion, unique idea etc.) by name: "Jim, in Ottawa; your solution for number four was the most elegant and economical of the lot. Here's how Jim did it ...."

- pass on any interesting material which has come your way ("Nell from Sarnia sent in a cutting from the *Clarion* which exactly illustrates what the first essay topic ... I'll read a bit of it out ...")

- suggest some useful ideas or approaches for a future assignment (not one in an adjacent time slot, which will already be in the mail)

- go over any details of the accompanying tutorial sheets (if any) which you feel need emphasis or further explanation

- provide new examples or new explanations of parts of the course content which seem to need some re-teaching

- draw attention to current examples, from recent events in the press, perhaps, of concepts or theories taught in the course -- in other words, bring course materials right up to date if you can.

In later tutorial tapes you may want to give some encouragement about the general progress of the class, or advice on study or review techniques for the final exam, and to wish the students luck. It's great to wish them a Merry Christmas, or even comment on today's weather, as long as you show them that you are aware that each of your students is far away and he or she may be having sunshine and New Year's while listening to what you are recording in a pre-Christmas blizzard.

Normally, tutorial tapes have about fifteen minutes each side. If you feel you *must* have more time than this, you should ask the Correspondence Office audio technicians to send you a longer blank tape. But remember, each course contains a lot of lectures on tape anyway, and long long tutorial tapes may not seem like strings of pearls of wisdom, but rather like a load of last straws.

A.5.2. *Tutorial sheets, samples, model answers*

Sometimes in addition to (or instead of) a tutorial tape, you may want to send out answer keys, copies of current material to illustrate course concepts, model answers, or samples of students' own work. Just a couple of points here.

- Ask your assignment clerk to look after any tutorial copying you want done (it should not be done in your department as a rule). If the copying involves somebody else's work, you should ask permission (often the bio. sheet which students complete in many courses gives this permission) or seek copyright clearance for newspaper articles and so on. Since this is a lengthy business, usually too lengthy for tutorial use, you are unlikely to want to do it too often. If you are unsure about whether you need to obtain copyright clearance, ask the Course Materials Co-ordinator.

- Your students will generally feel pleased and proud to have their work quoted or referred to in tutorial materials. (Ask permission, though, as some people do object to this.) If you have a large number of successful and interesting writers/learners, make a note beside each one's name on the marksheet when you quote from his or her assignments. Then take care to spread the honours around a little! Don't always quote from the best, but give the less successful some credit too. Most tutors say that one should never quote poor work as an example of what *not* to do. If you ever feel compelled to do this, choose an occasion when nearly all the class has made the same error, tell them so, and don't identify the author of the one you read out.

A.5.3. *Assignment analysis sheets*

These are all-purpose checklists (see A.3.6 for specialized checklists) which are attached to each assignment as it comes in. All kinds of these sheets are in existence -- maybe there is already one in use in your department -- and the TRACE office has a small representative collection which you may request a copy of. If you believe that the approach is a useful one, as many tutor-markers feel, then by all means borrow one or if necessary, compose one that fits your needs. It is going to be of most use if

- there is a space for the course number, assignment number, student's name and the grade received across the top

- there is a list of the desired (and undesirable) features on either end of a scale ("Excellent, satisfactory, needs care, poor," for example)

- OR, there is a series of spaces to be filled in descriptively under various headings ("Organisation [3 line space]. Use of examples [3 line space]. Diagrams [3 line space]" etc.)

- there is at least one quarter to one third of the page blank, in which to write a general comment or two on the work as a whole

- there is room for the tutor to sign and date the sheet at the bottom

- there is a back sheet of NCR paper which can be removed, so that a copy of the assignment analysis can be kept.

If your department does not have any assignment analysis sheets, by all means ask about having some made up. If this proves to be difficult, design your own, and then resort to old fashioned carbon paper slipped behind the page you are writing on. Failing all else, make a few brief notes about your comments for you to retain (the back of the bio sheets or filing cards [see A.2.3.] might be a good place for this).

In any case, reread your comments and notes before marking the next assignment from each student.

A.5.4. *Remedial teaching*

One of a tutor's responsibilities is to help the learners to identify the weaknesses in their learning or study skills or in their assignment work. When weaker areas are diagnosed, you as tutor need to suggest appropriate remedial activities. They may perhaps take these forms:

- additional problems or exercises to provide more practice (either chosen from the textbooks or presented by the tutor)
- explanations of difficult concepts in texts or lectures
- model answers (or partial answers) with comments on their strengths
- examples of the techniques/skills you want the student to learn, drawn from the textbook and provided with your commentary.

It is useful for tutors to remember that there are two major aspects to studying a distance course. First, the learners must concern themselves with the content of the course and second, they must develop adequate skills in the process of acquiring the new content.

For you, the tutor, this means that your attention must be on process *and* content, not on content alone. It is not helpful for you simply to tell your learners that they have not yet mastered the content, when in fact the techniques or process of studying appear to be at fault.

To encourage your students to master some of the higher cognitive skills (A.1.1.), try a combination of simple demonstration and practice. However, we all recognize that to teach problem-solving, analysis, aesthetic response and so on is far from easy.

Give your students guidance, then, not only about *what* they are learning but on *how* they need to go about learning it. In other words, you should be able to make some suggestions on study skills and on the accepted standards of scholarly presentation in your discipline.

A.5.5. *Format and marking guidelines*

With the first tutorial that you send back to your class, make sure to explain in detail, if necessary, the desirable or required format for the remaining assignments. Ideally, this explanation should have been given in the course outline or in a study guide included in the

course package. However, often you will find that even where advice on format has been provided, some of your students do not apply it effectively, so it is worth explaining carefully in your tutorial materials what is needed.

Similarly, you should explain how your marking scheme has been applied in the first assignment, especially when you plan to use the same sort of scheme for later assignments. For example, if you plan to ignore spelling and grammar errors when determining the marks on short answers, but to deduct up to 10% on a more formal essay, you should inform your class of your intentions.

You may prefer not to penalize students for certain kinds of errors until they have been warned about them. For example, in your first tutorial you may want to correct the form in which solutions are being presented. Make the corrections, explain why you believe they are necessary, and tell the class that you will not penalize similar errors in form until the last two assignments, which you expect them to submit in the correct format.

B. "BUSINESS" BACKGROUND: TUTOR AND INSTITUTION

B.1. Distance education at Waterloo

Distance education in the form of teaching by correspondence in an organized way has been available in Europe and North America for more than a century.

B.1.1. *A brief history of the Correspondence Program*

Here at the University of Waterloo, the first four courses to be made available to distance students were prepared in Physics on the suggestion of Professor J.D. Leslie of the Physics Department. From the beginning audiotapes and later audiocassettes were chosen as the central medium of teaching, with the lecture notes, textbooks, assignments and final exams as the essential support media.

In the next half dozen years, the number of courses grew rapidly, particularly with the entry of the Arts Faculty into distance teaching in 1974. Though some changes have occurred (additional media use such as sample kits, slides, videotapes, some teleconferencing, printed lecture notes, customized textbooks, for example), the Correspondence Program still offers courses which are the 'same' as those on campus. That is, they are credit courses with the same number and title, and more or less the same content.

Adult students are admitted to Correspondence courses and degree programs and assessed and promoted after their admission under the same policies as for on campus courses. Furthermore, the same instructors who teach courses on campus prepare the correspondence materials and often also teach the distance students. However, in many cases, tutor-markers are employed by the academic departments offering the distance courses to take over the teaching responsibilities.

Where distance, that is, correspondence courses do differ from their on-campus counterparts it is usually in one or more of these ways:

- more or different textbooks
- more assigned written work to be handed in
- different types of assignments
- no supervised testing (e.g. midterm tests or quizzes) except for one final examination
- structured learning materials designed for independent study
- supplied lecture notes (though these are not intended, of course, as full substitutes for the student's own notes)
- slide sets, videotapes or sample kits supplied to each student.

There are now about 20,000 course registrations annually in the Correspondence Program in approximately 300 different courses in 50 subject areas. The Arts Faculty has the largest number of courses, with Science, Mathematics, Environmental Studies and HKLS also teaching a considerable number of courses. Even Engineering offers a few courses in Engineering Law, Management Science, and Systems Design.

Three degrees are obtainable entirely through correspondence study: a BA, a BSc and a BES. There are also several Certificate or Diploma programs, for example, in Occupational Health Nursing, Social Work, Land Management for Land Surveyors. In the Arts Faculty, a General BA is available in Classical Studies (3 year or 4 year program), Economics, English (3 year or 4 year program), History (3 year or 4 year program), Philosophy, Psychology, Religious Studies, Social Work (3 year or 4 year program), Sociology and Non-major. An Honours BA is now available in Classical Studies and in English. In Environmental Studies a General BA is available in Geography, while a General BSc, Non-major in General Science is available in the Science Faculty and an Honours Science program has just begun. Appendix A.1 contains a Fact Sheet with further details about the University's Correspondence Program.

B.1.2. ***Who are the students?***

A detailed study of a random sample of the students taking courses by correspondence from the University of Waterloo was conducted in the winter of 1981.

The interesting facts which emerged from that study included these:

- There were more women than men, from a large age range (from 19 to 77) with an average age of mid-thirties.
- The majority was married, about half had children, almost 80% were employed, two-thirds being employed full-time. Only 9% were housewives and 7% students.
- Correspondence students were primarily teachers, other professionals, technicians or semi-professionals, managers, administrators or supervisors. (Only about one quarter of those employed did not fall into these categories.)
- Almost 80% lived in Ontario (but all the provinces were represented) and the same proportion were born in Canada. The average number of years' residence in Canada for those born in any one of the 46 other countries represented in the sample was 21 years.
- Almost one third of the correspondence students already had university degrees. About 17% had only completed high school (or had less education than that). Four-fifths had some university education or had completed non-university (post-secondary) education.
- Two-thirds were taking courses in the Arts Faculty, and the same proportion were registered in degree programs.

This suggests that there is a real possibility that most of your students will be older than you are, as preoccupied with their jobs as you are, and perhaps having greater family and community responsibilities than you do. You can't remind yourself too often that you are, as tutor,

committed to a joint learning enterprise with your peers, many of whom have more experience and more responsibility for others in the non-academic world than you do. Please remember to tread carefully!

Reading Five, Adults in teaching and learning, discusses some of the characteristics of adult learners.

B.1.3. *The TRACE Office*

Appendix A.2 is a sheet which explains the various activities and responsibilities of the TRACE Office, or Teaching Resources and Continuing Education.

Briefly, the Teaching Resources part of TRACE consists in helping anyone at Waterloo who is occupied in or interested in teaching to develop good teaching practices. Workshops, discussions, consultations, visiting speakers and a library of books and materials on instructional development are all available regularly or from time to time for professors, tutors, graduate students, demonstrators and so on.

The Continuing Education part of TRACE consists of all part-time and/or off-campus teaching and learning activities sponsored by the University. It includes such courses as those taught in the evenings in public libraries or short intensive professional training courses (for example, in computer use). By far the largest section of Continuing Education is the Correspondence Program.

Of most immediate interest to you as a tutor may be these facts:

- The Director of the Correspondence Program is the head of TRACE, Dr. C.K. Knapper.
- There is a staff of about half a dozen in the TRACE Office, in various capacities. If you encounter marking problems, or would like just to talk about your role as a tutor, you may want to consult either the Senior Associate, Dr. W. Shalinsky, or the Distance Education Advisor, Prof. S. Haag, or the Advisor on Teaching and Learning, Jo-Anne Willment.
- There is a library of approximately 7,000 items, on all aspects of teaching and learning. (The administrative staff will help you to find useful materials in the library in the TRACE Office.)
- The TRACE Office is in the Math and Computer Building (MC) on the fourth floor. Look in the campus phone book for the extension number and room number(s).
- Tutor-markers' training workshops are regularly scheduled by the TRACE Office, usually one or two per term. Contact the office at any time to enquire about these or other training activities.
- If you want more information on TRACE instructional development services and publications, a package on these is available upon request.

B.2. The Correspondence Office

B.2.1. *Where it is*

The Correspondence Office is the office which runs all the day to day operations of the Correspondence Program. It is in the building on the north-west corner of Philip and Columbia Streets (156 Columbia; or *Annex 2* for on-campus mailing purposes) which contains all the Continuing Education offices. You can walk there in ten minutes or less from the centre of the South Campus, or park (in ample space) by turning in beside Annex 2 off Columbia Street.

B.2.2. *Administrative structure*

Almost forty people work in the Correspondence Office. The Associate Director of Distance Education has an office there, as well as a number of people you may come into contact with in your job as tutor. Appendix A.3, Correspondence Office and Part-time Studies Office Staff Phone List will give you a good idea of all the activities going on in Annex 2. It also tells you how to phone your assignment clerk, the audio technicians, the admissions/registration clerks, the exam co-ordinator and others.

As well as the Associate Director, there are several managers, supervisors and co-ordinators of various aspects of the Correspondence Program. There is the Manager of Student Services who is concerned with any problem centred on individual students (for example, withdrawal or non-payment of fees) or with course registrations in general. The Manager of Course Development Services is responsible for overseeing the courses which are being prepared or reprepared and for all the difficult details of having courses ready to send out to students on time.

Other supervisors and co-ordinators are in charge of advertising and publishing the Correspondence Calendar, duplicating and distributing the course materials, organizing and running examinations, stocking and shipping textbooks, answering enquiries from students and would-be students, keeping registration and academic records, organizing the course notes and seeking copyright permissions, and collecting fees.

The most important contact you will have in the Correspondence Office is almost certainly your assignment clerk. This is the person who sends out or hands over your assignments to you, gets them back from you and has seen every crisis and every problem occur, not once but many times. If in doubt as to what to do next, in almost any administrative/'business' sense, first ask your assignment clerk to advise you about what you should do or whom you should consult for help.

B.2.3. *Facts and figures*

Appendix A.1, and 3 will give you some grasp of how busy the Correspondence Office has to be. The facts and figures may not seem directly relevant to your job as tutor. You will see that your role, although it is very important, is only one of a large number of crucial activities required for the Correspondence Program. However, the scheduling of course preparation, advertising, registration, examining, sending out grade reports and so on, is all centred, in a sense, on *your* job: teaching or tutoring the courses. The students depend on you to reassure them that their studies are going well and to guide them when they are unsure of how best to

learn the new facts and ideas. So please take that short week of marking and tutoring time for each set of assignments very seriously. *You* represent the University of Waterloo and all it stands for to most of your students, so do your very best for them!

B.3. The structure of courses

B.3.1. *The learning package*

You may have had little or nothing to do with distance education of any kind up to now. Perhaps you've never seen the typical learning package which goes out from the Correspondence Program at Waterloo. Obviously, these course packages can differ quite a bit. As a rule, though, they contain these items:

- A black plastic folder which looks rather like a binder. Inside are spaces for sixteen cassettes. Usually a term course has approximately twenty 'lectures' (ten cassettes). There may be one or two blank cassettes for students to record assignments on, or one or two pre-recorded tutorial lectures. Any tutorial cassettes you send out to your students will fill the remaining spaces. Students pay a tape deposit fee, redeemable on return of all the tapes in good condition within 60 days after the exam is written. Any faulty tape will be replaced at once if the student phones the Correspondence Office with a complaint.

- A Course Outline, often in a more or less standard format, printed on coloured paper. This is a package of information stapled together separately from the lecture notes, but included with them in a paper folder with a coloured chevron on the front. All the details about assignment grading, due dates, topics etc. should be included in the Course Outline. (Sometimes the assignments are separately listed, or given among the course notes.) When you have obtained your copy of the course materials, find the assignment sheets first, then look for the facts about dates, grading and so on in the *Course Outline*.

- Course (or Lecture) Notes. These are notes related to each tape. Some are only a page or so long, others may be much longer. There may be general notes as well, related to the course as a whole rather than to individual lectures. There may be various resource materials in addition. Most typically these are either illustrations or reprinted readings.

- Textbook(s). Some courses use only one (or no) textbook. (Often these courses have a lot of lecture notes instead.) Some courses may have several textbooks, particularly where these books are, for example, copies of plays or short stories, or several specialized monographs relevant to specific topics discussed in the lectures. Some courses may have slide sets, sample kits, videotapes or other aids.

- As a tutor, you are naturally entitled to borrow (or have convenient access to, in a departmental reading/study room, for example) the complete package of course materials used in your course, including the textbooks. You should ask your instructor to contact the Course Development Services Manager to arrange for you to be given the course materials if none are available in your department. Since the complete package is quite expensive, treat it with care -- it is only on loan to

you! Many tutors find that a xeroxed copy of the crucial sheets from the Course Outline is useful for convenient reference to the assignment topics, as it saves having to look through a lot of sheets when each new set of assignments comes in.

B.3.2. *The assignments*

As previously described, the assignment topics and/or instructions for the students are generally given in the *Course Outline* or as a separate package of pages from the lecture notes. Sometimes the assignments are interspersed through the lecture notes, in an attempt by the course author to make sure that the students cover certain groups of tapes and the notes that go with them before attempting to answer an assignment on them.

Some of the assignments may be what are called 'self-assessment questions'. These are intended for the learners to use to check their own progress, and will not come in to you for marking at all. The answers are usually provided in the notes already. Occasionally you may be expected to send out the answers to a self-assessment exercise with tutorial materials for a regular tutor-marked assignment.

B.3.3. *The final examination*

The final examination question paper will most likely be set by the course author/instructor of your course. The papers are requested by the Correspondence Office's Examination Co-ordinator early in the term in which the course is being taught. Your instructor might ask you for your input on the exam paper, might even ask you to set the paper (though this is unlikely) and to write out a sheet of detailed information on the format of the exam paper, to be sent out to the class with one of the returned assignments.

Some instructors prefer to mark the students' exam scripts themselves, others will expect you to do the grading of exams as well as assignments.

Exams are written at one of about a hundred exam centres across Canada, usually in local high schools or colleges, and scripts are mailed or courier-delivered back to the Correspondence Office. (Students who live more than 80 kilometers from a centre may write with an individual proctor.) The scripts are each in an envelope with the student's name on the outside, to prevent any confusion and make checking up on delayed scripts easier. These envelopes will be ready for tutors and instructors to pick up or have delivered to their departments within about a week to ten days after the exams have been written.

Exam dates vary slightly, but are generally the last Saturday in January, the first Saturday in May and the second Saturday in August. Grades for these exams will be due in the Registrar's Office approximately three weeks after the exam dates (See Appendix B.5.).

Normally all exam question papers must be returned with the scripts, and in some courses there is a penalty for non-return. You should report any non-returned question papers (missing from the exam envelopes) to your instructor. Sometimes an individual proctor's statement will be included in the exam envelope. Return any of these to the Examination Co-ordinator in the Correspondence Office. You can also check with this co-ordinator if you have any questions about possible irregularities in the exam handling or return of exam envelopes, particularly if you are missing one or two scripts which you believe should have been written, because the student submitted a complete set of assignments.

Exam scripts do not normally need any comments written on them as they are not returned to the students. When you have finished marking them, if this is part of your duties, give them to your instructor or your departmental secretary after you have recorded the grades on your mark report sheet. Double-check all calculations for accuracy, using the copy of your assignment clerk's mark report sent to you with the final exam scripts (see Appendix B.2.: Assignment Control).

Some instructors send a summary or comment sheet on the exam results to all the students who wrote the exam. If your instructor wants you to participate in this part of tutoring the class, s/he will let you know what you should do.

B.4. Procedures and practical details

This section will give you a clear idea of all your responsibilities as tutor on a very practical level -- the nitty-gritty details of what you have to do to get the job done efficiently and to earn your paycheque! (Further discussions of some of these responsibilities can be located elsewhere in *Techniques for Tutors* by checking the Contents.)

B.4.1. *Tutors' responsibilities: what you have to do*

Your duties may vary a bit from department to department or even from course to course. Obviously the central one is almost certain to be some or all of the marking of students' assignments. Here are others, most of which you are likely to be asked to perform (check with your instructor or your departmental Correspondence Officer about your specific duties *each time you are assigned a course*):

Learning about the program and the course

- attending a briefing or training session in your department (ask for such a session or help to arrange one if one doesn't yet exist)
- attending a Tutors' Workshop offered by the TRACE Office (usually these workshops are offered in October, February and May, a week or two before the first assignments come in)
- reading a handbook for tutors like this one, or one prepared by your department
- obtaining a package of (or easy access to) your course materials from your instructor or the Course Development Services Manager in the Correspondence Office (see B.3.1.)
- obtaining a tape recorder from the Correspondence Office on which to listen to course tapes and make tutorial tapes if required
- discussing the assignments in your course with your instructor and formulating a marking scheme for each one (see A.3.1.)
- familiarizing yourself thoroughly with your course package and the academic content of the course

- finding out the official Time Slots for the term (see the Correspondence Calendar under Assignment and Examination Schedule). There are *six* official slots (although a few courses, for example, some language courses, may use all six, most use fewer).

- finding out from the Course Outline (or elsewhere in your course materials: see B.3.2.) which Time Slots your instructor is using for the course assignment due dates. When you know these, mark the week following the due date (i.e. approximately the seventh to the fourteenth days after the students' mailing deadline for the assignment) on your calendar. You should then make as few commitments of your time for these 'marking weeks' as you can manage, as you will have to work hard to complete all your tutor's duties for the assignment in the short five to seven days you are allowed. Appendix B.1. is an example of the Marking of Assignments memo sheet which will be sent to you by your assignment clerk when your first assignment set is ready for marking.

Marking and teaching responsibilities: a) marking assignments

- Collecting the assignments from your assignment clerk in Annex 2 (the Correspondence Office, 156 Columbia St.). Or you may find that the assignments will be routinely sent over to your department, where they will be obtainable from your department's Correspondence Officer, your instructor, your departmental secretary or your own mail box. If in doubt, phone your assignment clerk or ask your instructor for instructions on how to proceed.

- Opening the assignment envelopes, checking that each has the student's name on. Staple on the *front* of the assignment (do *not* use paperclips) an assignment analysis sheet if you will be using one (see A.5.3), writing the course number, the student's name and the assignment number across the top of the sheet. Staple any additional letter or note which the student has sent you to the *back* of the assignment. This will remind you to send an answer or acknowledgement back to the student. (Afterwards make a check mark on the note, adding the date of your response, tear it off the back of the assignment and put it in your marking folder.) You can throw away the envelopes *unless* there are cassettes or other bulky items to be returned in the original envelopes (see A.3.6.), *or* your assignment clerk particularly asks you to return all assignments inside their original envelopes. In this case, put the student's grade on the outside of the envelope.

- Marking the assignments (see A.3 and A.4). Record the grade legibly on the upper right hand corner of each assignment, or each analysis sheet. Be consistent in recording the grade in the same place on each assignment. Attach a note to your assignment clerk (paperclip will do!) to each oddball assignment, that is, one for which the clerk needs to make a special notation ("P. Jones will return this assignment in Slot Six to receive a grade," "R. Smith's assignment is out of 20, not 10, because she has my permission not to submit Assignment Three," etc.).

- Keeping a copy (N.C.R. paper, carbon, or quick summary) of as much as is practical of your comments to your students. Consult this report as you mark each student's *next* assignment.

- Recording each grade on the record sheet which will be sent to you by your assignment clerk (see Appendix B.2. for a sample of the record sheet) with the first set of assignments you receive for your course. A second sheet will be sent to you at the end of term, copied from the record sheet which has been filled out all term by your assignment clerk. This gives you the chance to double check your grade records.

Marking and teaching responsibilities: b) providing tutorial help

- Preparing tutorial materials to accompany each returned assignment (see A.5). You should contact one of the Correspondence Office's audio technicians about how to record a tutorial tape. (A blank cassette for the tutorial will probably have been included with your assignments. Remember to identify the tutorial tape clearly: Course number, assignment tutorial number, side one or two.) Tutorial tapes may be recorded at the Correspondence Office, in the Arts Faculty Study Lab (contact the Language Lab Director, ML. 110, Ext. 2735), or on a high quality tape recorder. You can request a recorder on loan for this purpose, as well as for listening to your course lectures, from the Correspondence Office audio technicians. Any written tutorial materials should be on standard Correspondence Program paper for duplication in the Correspondence Office (ask your assignment clerk for the special paper, or your departmental secretary. A sample of this paper is in Appendix B.4).

- Returning *all* tutorial materials and *all marked* assignments in one appropriate interoffice envelope or package (ask your departmental secretary) to your assignment clerk by name, Corresp. Prog., Annex 2, by the return due date on your Marking of Assignments memo sheet. If you have not succeeded in finishing the last few scripts before the due date, send in what has been marked together with the tutorial materials (*never* separately) and finish and send over the stragglers and latecomers' assignments as soon as you can. (Or you may be asked simply to return the marked assignments to your instructor or your departmental secretary).

- Responding without fail in a note or letter to every student enquiry, letter or phone call. Note that any long distance phone call that you make to one of your students will have to be paid for in your department, as the Correspondence Office does not have a budget for tutorial phone calls. Before making any calls, talk to your instructor or your departmental secretary to find out about budgetary policies, as some departments are unable to budget much for calling their distance students. In any case a letter will usually be adequate except in real emergencies (your department does pay for stamps!). Your assignment clerk will also mail out any letters you write to your students upon request. (You may wish to look at C.2.1. and C.2.2. on communicating by letter or phone with your students.)

- Staying healthy! Your department may not have any plans for backup marking in the event of your illness. Contact your instructor and your assignment clerk *at once* if you think illness, surgery etc. will prevent proper marking being carried out. Don't try to mark assignments when you should be in bed, but don't forget to notify someone right away, even if you're already unconscious in a hospital bed!

Marking and teaching responsibilities: c) grading final exams

If you are asked to grade final examinations, begin by discussing an answer key or checklist and a marking scheme with your instructor (see A.3.1.). Here are some pointers from experienced exam markers (and see B.3.3.):

- If the final grade sheet contains the name of a student from whom you have never received any assignment or exam, enter UNKNOWN on the sheet instead of a grade. If there are any missing assignments or exams from students who are otherwise known to you, consult your own Faculty's Policy on Grading. (These policies are listed in the University of Waterloo Calendar each year by the various Faculties.) Don't assign any of these: INC, AEG, CR, NMR or DNW, unless you are quite sure of your Faculty and departmental policy on the use of these designations. Your instructor, departmental correspondence officer or Faculty Associate Dean can each advise on any difficult cases.

- As you open each envelope, check that *all* enclosed materials are identified with the student's name, especially any loose sheets.

- Return any unused exam booklets and any proctor's report to the exam co-ordinator in the Correspondence Office.

- Check that the question paper is included in the envelope (see B.3.3.).

- Mark the complete set of scripts for any objective, multiple-choice, *very* short answer questions etc. The speed you develop makes up for the time lost in double-handling scripts.

- Marking the material in the exam booklets can be done script by script *or* question by question across the complete set. (Each method has its advantages.)

- Don't make any comments on the exam scripts -- it is a waste of your time as they will not be returned to the students. Simply use checks or crosses and add up the marks in the margins.

- Most markers prefer not to enter the mark for the term (assignment total) or for the objective part of the exam on the front of each exam booklet until *after* the rest of the script has been marked. This helps to prevent preconceptions about the appropriate grade to assign.

- Transfer all marks to your grade record sheet, doublechecking addition as you go.

- When you have finished marking, bundle up the scripts, label them (date, course) and hand them over to your instructor or departmental secretary for storage.

- Submit your final grades on time (having rechecked your addition one more time) to your instructor or departmental secretary (see Appendix B.5). Note: only a faculty member may sign the final Grade Reporting List which is taken over to the Registrar's Office by your departmental secretary.

B.4.2. *What NOT to do!*

Tutors can make mistakes or forget to do what is necessary, of course. To remind you about some of these sins of omission or commission, read this section now and refer to it again later when you are beginning to mark assignments. I've listed the points under the headings of the various people who depend on you to do your job well:

Your students

DON'T

- fail to answer each of their notes, letters and calls
- forget to check that their assignments, written or oral (on cassettes), have their names on (*they* can make mistakes, but don't *you*!)
- use sarcastic or cutting comments on their work (ever!)
- think of them just as names on a list instead of as individuals with individual difficulties
- think of them or refer to them as "kids" (they aren't - are *you*?)
- deliberately remain anonymous and faceless so that your instructor can take the flak.

Your instructor

DON'T

- fail to familiarize yourself thoroughly with his or her course content and materials
- fail to discuss the assignments and/or final exam to determine the objectives s/he has in mind and to draw up a competent marking scheme
- forget to pass on any student's comments which may help to improve the course materials.

Your department

DON'T

- fail to notify the appropriate person (instructor, correspondence officer or secretary) *at once* if you are unable to complete the marking of a set of assignments
- run up unauthorized long-distance phone calls
- demand last minute copying or typing of tutorial materials "because they were due yesterday"
- use the departmental copying machine for multiple tutorial sheets (those are the responsibility of the Correspondence Office).

Your assignment clerk

DON'T

- write grades at the end of assignments. Always put them in a consistent front-cover position (top right hand corner preferred but see A.4.2)

- fail to meet the deadline for returning the assignments. (You will first be chased up, which is a nuisance for your assignment clerk, then reprimanded if necessary by higher levels of authority if you habitually ignore marking deadlines.)

- send tutorial materials in bits and pieces or separately from the main body of the assignments

- wait to return *all* the assignments a week late, instead of returning three-quarters of them marked on time *with* the tutorial materials. (Then do work hard to mark the remaining few, returning just those ones late.)

- ask for "J. Brown's essay to be copied as a sample answer" for your tutorial. (Do send all tutorial materials as a copy-ready master -- here's where you *do* use your department's copying machine!)

- send assignments back without all your notes, analysis sheets or whatever firmly stapled to each assignment (no loose papers, please, and paperclips only when you want your assignment clerk to remove your notes before sending the assignment to the student)

- fail to keep your assignment clerk notified in writing of oddball assignments ("no grade this time -- she'll resubmit in later slot" etc.)

- fail to inform your clerk if an assignment comes to you directly in your department instead of via the Correspondence Office (same goes for direct return, too).

The Correspondence Office

DON'T

- give too many extensions to students on either assignments or exams. (Do consult the Exam Co-ordinator whenever any extension would run past the current term.)

- forget to forward any notes from students which purport to be or contain withdrawal or course change statements, changes of address, medical certificates or proctors' statements. (Do contact the Student Services Manager over any administrative problem or student complaint.)

Last but not least, yourself

DON'T

- fail to keep an open ear to all the sources of self-development as a tutor (Do watch for workshops offered by the TRACE Office, for example.)

- try to solve any situation which could become very tricky (e.g. suspected academic offences) without due caution and consultation with your instructor and/or your Faculty's Associate Dean

- fail to seek advice when it would save you time and anxiety

- expect to lead a normal life for the week when each assignment set arrives

- behave towards your students as though they were inexperienced teenagers. If you are in your mid-twenties, then on average your students are ten to fifteen years older than you are, and they may be fully as well-educated as and have wider life experience than you. In addition, they are likely to have both a full-time job and dependents. So keep a due sense of humility!

- become callous, impersonal, cynical or arrogant. The entire system is no doubt full of flaws, but do always remember that tutoring is a human interpersonal contact *par excellence*, and your learners are as human as you are.

B.5. What students have to do

A short outline of the procedures which your students must follow may be useful to you in responding to their non-academic concerns.

B.5.1. *Admission and course selection*

Every Correspondence Calendar of Courses (see B.6) contains several copies of the Course Application form and an Application for Admission form. (There are also several pages in the Calendar which provide admission and application information.) Admission requirements are the same as those for on-campus students, though there are more mature distance students, of course (those taking correspondence courses who do not possess the typical minimum admission requirements from Ontario or other secondary schools) than in the on-campus group.

Courses are chosen from the Calendar and requested on the application form. Most students select one or two courses per term. Textbooks are ordered, if required, on the same form. Application deadlines are mid-August, mid-October and mid-February, although special cases are sometimes considered after those dates. All application forms are countersigned by the student's academic adviser.

B.5.2. *Dropping a course or withdrawing*

Admission and course selection, course changes or drops and withdrawals (defined as dropping all courses for a particular term) are explained in the Correspondence Calendar. Students are not allowed much time in which to exchange a course (perhaps two to four weeks between the receipt of the course materials and the effective beginning of the "term": the thirteen weeks for study preceding the final exam date.) However, students may drop a course or withdraw without academic penalty as late as two to three weeks before the final exam date. If dropping or withdrawing are done early in the term, a full or partial refund of fees is possible. In case of difficulty, advise your students to consult the Manager of Student Services.

B.5.3. *Contact with the university*

Students (or potential students) who want to contact the university can do so in these ways:

- a call in person or by phone to the Reception area in the Correspondence Office. The reception clerks have a lot of experience in passing enquiries on to the most useful sources of help (Tel. 519.8884050)
- consultation with the Manager of Student Services in the Correspondence Office
- consultation with the Mature Student Services' Co-ordinator, whose office is in Modern Languages
- a letter or phone call to the academic department responsible for courses or programs of interest to the student
- a letter, note attached to an assignment or phone call to the instructor or tutor of courses in which s/he is registered (or plans to register).

A careful reading of the Correspondence Calendar should tell most students whom to contact and how, as well as how the system works. There is also a booklet, *Read This First*, enclosed with every package of course materials, which explains the most important details about the Correspondence Program and the course packages. In addition each course contains a Course Outline (or equivalent section of the course notes) in which the information that the learner needs to study the course effectively is provided.

Lastly, every student receives a course evaluation questionnaire for each course s/he is taking (see Appendix B.3). These are returned to the Associate Director for Distance Education for forwarding to the course instructor after the final grades for the course have been submitted. If you, as tutor, would like to have any further evaluative materials sent to your students, you should contact the Associate Director or the Manager of Course Development Services early in the term in which you are handling the course, to discuss what you can do.

B.6. 'Correspondence Day', the *Correspondent* and the Correspondence Calendar

There are three main sources of information about the Correspondence Program which are also used as a means of contact for distance students with the University of Waterloo.

Each year (recently it has been held in late September) a Correspondence Day is held on campus. All the correspondence students are invited to visit the campus for a program of lectures, tours, visits to departments, conversation with instructors and advisers and a social get-together. All the correspondence instructors and tutors are warmly invited to attend at least some of the day's sessions. You should make every effort to be there, as it is very disappointing for students not to find their teachers available for even a brief chat when many of them have come from quite a distance. So come along and meet up to three hundred or so distance learners! It will give you an excellent first-hand impression of the sort of students who are in

your course. More than likely, two or three of your own students will be there, eagerly looking for you so that they can introduce themselves.

The *Correspondent* is a newspaper published four times a year with articles of interest to anyone connected with the Correspondence Program, students in particular. It is circulated to instructors and tutors in their departments. Among the articles and letters are such items as interviews with course authors, news about developments in the course offerings and a considerable number of used textbooks offered for sale.

The Correspondence Calendar or catalogue of courses is published once a year in the Spring. It provides a great deal of administrative and academic information and you should certainly have a copy on your desk. The administrative assistant in charge of publications in the Correspondence Office will send one to you on request (Ext. 2002).

B.7. The *Distance Teaching News* and the TRACE Office Library

Two sources of ideas and information which correspondence course authors and tutors have available to them are the twice-yearly newsletter, the *Distance Teaching News* (sent out Spring and Fall from the TRACE Office), and the TRACE Office Library (MC 4051). As a tutor you are entitled to receive a copy of the *D.T.N.*, so just call the office at Ext. 3132 to ask for your name to be put on the mailing list. Any of the TRACE staff will also be glad to help you locate whatever our library holds in the way of readings, both theoretical and practical. There is a short Bibliography at the end of this handbook, listing books and journals available in the TRACE Office Library of particular interest to distance education tutors.

C. COMMUNICATION AND COUNSELLING: TUTOR AND STUDENT

C.1. The support learners need

There is a basic dualism in the ideas of recent theorists about tutoring and support services in adult education, particularly in connection with distance teaching and learning.

Some people argue strongly for the essential need to foster adult learners' autonomy and individual control over their own learning program and timetable. So learning packages should enable the student to be as self-sufficient as possible; tutors should perhaps be available to respond to students' specific enquiries, but only to the extent of guiding them quickly back into standing on their own feet again.

Others believe that it is a vital part of a tutor's duties to initiate contact with each student at the beginning of the course and at regular intervals thereafter. It is essential, these theorists suggest, that the learners should be helped and supported to whatever extent is needed to ensure that they succeed in mastering the course content as fully as possible. Students are encouraged to contact their tutors frequently, and tutors will phone those who haven't checked in with them, to ask how their studying is going.

Here at Waterloo, instructors and tutors generally fall somewhere between these two groups. Most of us here believe that our job is to help our students to develop independence and self-sufficiency in studying. However, we think we also ought to take the trouble to provide as much tutorial assistance in response to assignment submissions as we can (see A.5 above).

In your role as tutor you may prefer to lean more towards encouraging your students' self-sufficiency or towards providing them with spontaneous support. In either case you may be interested to know that some recent research suggests higher course completion rates as well as more interest and involvement with the learning materials on the part of students who are working with personal tutor-counsellors (Rekkedal, 1986).

Reading Six, The role of the correspondence tutor, describes (briefly) the role of the correspondence tutor, emphasizing that friendly tutoring is important and need not conflict with academic standards.

Counselling in an educational context as a tutor is likely to carry it out has been defined by Bernadette Robinson (1981) as "the advice, help and support given to students to enable them to make satisfactory progress in the system". This advice, help and support is needed in three general areas: academic, motivational and counselling proper.

C.1.1. *Academic tutoring and advice*

Your students are of course going to expect academic tutoring from you. This may take several forms:

- detailed course-related tutoring -- how a specific assignment should be handled, how to apply methods learned in the course to the solution of problems, how to make the best use of the learning package to find answers to questions, for example

- specific subject-related teaching -- how to grasp difficult concepts, how to approach a new aspect of the material, how to interpret particular technical terms

- general academic discussion -- how course content relates to the wider discipline, how the discipline reflects prior or future experience of the learner's world, what constitutes such concepts as, for example, proof, evidence, the scientific method, analysis and synthesis and so on

- advice on subject-related or course-related study skills -- on writing appropriately for the discipline, on exercising informed selectivity on course content, on correctly interpreting statistical data, on developing pronunciational accuracy, on an appropriate format for presenting a mathematical argument, for example.

C.1.2. *Motivational encouragement*

Sympathetic and tactful encouragement is an excellent motivator. Your students may need your encouragement at any stage to help them to maintain an energetic involvement with the learning package. You may be needed to help them persevere when they get their first assignment back, to carry them through the mid-course doldrums, or to give them courage to face a final exam hurdle when their self-confidence is low.

Here are some ways which you may like to consider in helping maintain your students' motivation.

- Being particularly encouraging in returning the first assignment: make sure your tutorial tape is lively, personal, enthusiastic, welcoming. Give your learners the sense of being in a class while at the same time speaking to each person as an individual. (Remember, one good approach is to sound in your tutorial tape as though you were talking on the phone to a friend!) Try hard to get across to them that you are a friendly, energetic and resourceful fellow learner -- rather than a 'professorial' teacher -- who is genuinely concerned that every individual student in the class should enjoy a satisfying learning experience.

- Giving each student a small boost with each returned assignment: a suggestion for future approaches or for the next assignment (at least if it is not in the adjacent Time Slot -- that one will already have been mailed out). Congratulate him on a successful aspect of his essay. Suggest to her an alternative way to tackle a type of problem which is giving her difficulty. Always talk in terms of the future or the next step -- "next time," "when you have mastered this, you will be in a good position to try ...," "when you come to Assignment Four," "now you are ready to ..."

- Bringing relevant and up to date examples of course concepts into tutorial materials: current news stories or television programs, recent books or movies, magazine articles etc. (References and short excerpts -- up to about 50 words -- are o.k., but any complete reprints would need copyright clearance, so avoid them. However, *some* rapid clearances may be possible, especially on articles in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record or the Toronto Globe and Mail, for example. Contact the Course Materials Co-ordinator on this at Ext. 3952.)

- Sending a short note to a student who has apparently stopped sending assignments in. Don't probe or push. Remind him that he has done a competent job so far -- it would be a pity to let it slide. Ask her whether her fifth assignment is on its way, as you were encouraged with the progress she'd shown in her fourth. Ask whether you can do anything to help. ("Is the length of the fourth assignment giving you cold feet? If so, why don't you ..." "Would a short extension make it easier for you to finish? If so, give me a call next Wednesday morning and we'll arrange something".)

- Above all, showing your own genuine enthusiasm for the discipline and the course content. Enthusiasm is contagious, as so many people have often remarked.

One of the things which often discourages distance students is that they really don't know how well they are doing, in spite of all the feedback we try to give them. They may feel that their progress is slow, their skills rusty or inadequate, their memory failing, the time they need to study far too long, simply because they have no one to compare themselves with. Anything you can do to inform them about these reactions is helpful. Tell them that this assignment always takes the most time, or that everyone seemed to find question 3 very hard, or that almost nobody remembered to use the examples in chapter 4. Tell them that it takes 3 weeks on campus to cover this topic, or that, in general, their essays are of a higher standard than the class whose work you marked last term on campus (usually true!).

Distance learners often miss the support of the other students in the class from which on-campus students derive a lot of useful knowledge and motivational energy. There is little opportunity for the equivalent of after-class discussion in the coffee-shop or the pub, and so the role of the tutors takes on greater importance for at least some of their distance students. Be ready to supply whatever you can of this informal level of support for your students, either in writing (usually in response to questions they send in) or on the telephone, if they contact you to talk about the course. (Don't worry, most will not in fact do so -- but be prepared.)

Lastly, if you can think of anything to do to help prevent a learner from becoming progressively more discouraged and finally dropping out, do it! It won't cause anyone here an intolerable burden to grant an extension, while it may save a student's time, money, ego and future goodwill towards learning at a distance if you can keep him or her afloat until the final exam is over. Encourage *any* student to write the final exam if it is too late to withdraw without any academic penalty, on the grounds that s/he hasn't anything further to lose by doing it, at least! However, if a student contacts you about a legitimate last minute emergency -- illness, bereavement or other crisis -- then persuade him/her to stay away from the exam and to let the Correspondence Office know at once about the problem. (It is easier to reschedule the exam if the student has not already seen a copy of it.)

C.1.3. *Counselling support*

Counselling in general in the university context consists of providing a variety of support services. These include career advice, both academic and post-academic (vocational); secondly, therapeutic counselling for personal problems, life crises and so on; thirdly, diagnostic and remedial counselling to develop general study skills, effective time management, student professionalism, stress management and so on; and lastly, administrative counselling to help students in interacting with the university system more efficiently.

Most of these kinds of support services are usually regarded at Waterloo as only very marginally or incidentally the responsibility of the academic tutor. However, there are several ways in which you can reasonably help your students who may be experiencing difficulties in any of these areas. For example, you might consider

- acting as a 'broker' for the student. That is, taking the time to find out whether a particular office or individual on campus can provide the help and advice your student needs. Then put him or her in contact with the source of help

- listening sympathetically and carefully to your students' concerns. Some may actually phone you, most will ask questions or voice complaints in notes attached to assignments. Try to respond only after thought, and preferably in writing, in the same way that you would listen and respond to a friend's concerns

- offering advice only with caution and in areas where you do have some expertise: academic advice ("Your question about taking another course in this discipline is best answered, I think, by saying that if you prefer the theoretical side, then 'x' may be a good one to choose, as 'z' is primarily concerned with case studies"), general study techniques or skills, or student professionalism ("A good way to approach a new textbook is to ..." "Can you perhaps present your material more effectively? Try ...." "A good dictionary and style manual can be very useful if you use them this way:..").

Probably the most helpful counselling you are going to do as a tutor comes from being aware of how the system here at Waterloo works. Find out who *can* help your student with this or that type of problem, so that you can act as a really effective 'broker' or referral person. Whenever it's possible, collect the details of the difficulty in writing (at least recording the outcome in writing). Contact the appropriate expert helper on behalf of your student whenever this looks as though it will save him or her time, confusion and money in phone bills. Then write a letter (copies back to the expert and in your files or marking folder) to your student, summarizing the practical aspects of the problem and what needs to be done about them next, if a solution hasn't yet been reached.

Appendix A4, Important Dates to Remember, is part of the 'Read This First' booklet included with every course package. (You may like to have your own copy of this booklet -- contact the Supervisor of Duplication in the Correspondence Office and ask for one if so.)

After all is said and done, you will probably find that notes on returned assignments, the occasional letter, and one or two phone calls are going to represent the extent of your counselling duties for the vast majority of your class.

C.2. Introduction to communication

What are some of the communication skills that you will need to exercise in your job as a course tutor? It is clear enough that face to face skills are likely to be the least called upon and that written communication is the commonest way in which you will contact your students. Telephone interaction is another means, less in use than writing, but more than face to face discussion. Let's consider each of these in turn in greater detail.

C.2.1. *Writing comments and letters*

In A.3.3. (and elsewhere) we've looked at what sort of comments you will be writing in response to students' assignments. Here we want to consider how you can respond to the questions students ask which do not relate immediately to the assignment topic. First decide whether an informal note at the end of the returned assignment is appropriate to the student's needs or whether a letter is more suitable. You may find it easier to decide this by asking yourself exactly what it is that the student wants from you. If you think your answer is going to be brief, informal and/or concerned with course content only, then a note on or attached to the assignment is most appropriate. You can then keep a copy or make a duplicate notation on the student's bio card (see A.2.3). At least record the date and a check mark on each incoming note so that you know when you answered it.

If you think that your student needs a longer explanation that concerns something other than course content, a letter is in order.

You can write to 'Dear Josie' or to 'Dear Ms. Jones', depending on the level of formality you feel most comfortable with, and sign yourself 'Sue Q.' if you feel 'Susan P. Quilp' is too formal and 'Susie' alone too casual or intimate. If the letter is difficult to write for any reason, it may help you first to make a list of the questions you believe the student wants answered on a piece of scrap paper. Then answer as helpfully as you can each one that you feel competent (or are willing) to respond to. Factual questions to which you don't know the answers mean a little extra work for you. Anything other than academic questions (interpreting that fairly widely here) you are of course completely free to decide not to respond to. Most tutors prefer to write in an informal style, keep copies of all letters they send out, and pass on letters that suggest a difficult problem to their instructor or departmental correspondence officer.

Some of the letters you receive will be addressed to the instructor (professor, course author), some to you as tutor-marker. Try tactfully to ensure that anything you pass on to your instructor unanswered or unopened has actually been attended to. One useful way to do this is simply to ask your instructor whether the student's problem has resolved itself now, or even just "How is so-and-so getting along? Any more enquiries from her after that note I passed on last week?" It may be helpful to offer to answer *all* the letters unless they are specifically addressed to the instructor in person.

To summarize:

- respond to *every* written enquiry in some way, even if very informally on the back of a returning assignment
- keep a copy of any response you make (or notes on content) if you think you may have to refer to it again in the future
- write informally, clearly and without jargon, as distance students are far more likely to be confused by (or simply not understand) university "technical talk" than on-campus students
- be friendly and helpful, suggesting other advisers' and counsellors' names as appropriate

- never try to solve everyone's problems all by yourself -- pass difficult enquiries on to others, starting with your instructor

- use departmental stationery whenever you can, although handwritten letters are fine -- and easy to copy on the photocopier (remember that either your department or your assignment clerk will see that the letter is mailed out, and the latter will also supply the student's address if you don't have it)

- refer the student to the printed sources of information he or she will already have as a source of answers to some enquiries (the Correspondence Calendar or the Course Outline, for example).

Reading Seven, Counselling by correspondence in distance education, discusses some advantages, disadvantages and techniques for counselling by correspondence in distance education.

C.2.2. *Telephone conversations*

Before your tutoring responsibilities actually begin, it will be helpful for you to check with your departmental secretary about telephone budget and which telephone you should use, at what times. You may be able to arrange for an extension phone in the graduate students' office in your department, if necessary, or to use the phone in the department office one evening a week, for example. Learn how to work the rather complicated LINK telephones we use at UW so that you can readily transfer callers to other numbers here without 'losing' them.

When one of your students calls you, try to get his or her name right at once. Reuse it instantly ("Oh, hello Mary, yes this is Susie Q. and I'm marking the WORLD 101 assignments. What can I do for you?"). Write her name on a piece of paper, including her family name if you can, as you talk. Ask her to wait just a moment while you find your marking folder if you want to stall for time, or if you sense that Mary wants to talk about her grades or what you wrote on her last assignment. Then settle back with your pen and piece of paper handy and *listen* carefully. Be cheerful, friendly and reassuring, but interrupt as little as possible. If Mary asks a number of questions all at once, or if her enquiries are confusing, jot down what you *think* she wants to ask you about. When she pauses, say something like "Now I want to make sure I'm following you" and rephrase what she is asking as simply as you can. Then try to deal helpfully with only one question at a time.

If the phone call covers ground such as academic course requirements which you think should be put in writing, tell your caller you will follow up with a letter summarizing the call. In any case add to your jotted notes after you have finished talking, if necessary, and then put them away in your marking folder as a record of the call.

It's helpful to make sure you have the student's telephone number if you anticipate having to call back or to pass it on to another advisor or counsellor. You can also make a note of when it will be a good time to call back. However, do all you can to avoid repeat telephone calls in a situation where a letter will do just as well (or perhaps better, as it can be reread and retained for reference by both you and your student).

If the student wants to have a number of questions and difficulties cleared up, offer to

contact the various advisers, administrators or instructors here, and to get back to the caller with the answers. Again, written responses are generally better in several respects than another phone call.

A straightforward page or two of advice is ***Reading Eight, Communicating by phone***. Remember, though, that you should check with your instructor or your departmental secretary before undertaking any telephoning, as most of it will inevitably involve considerable long-distance charges. However, if you believe a phone call is going to be by far the most productive means of contact in a particular situation, by all means tell your department so! (This could mean a visit to your chairperson, so arm yourself with some good arguments first.)

C.2.3. *Face to face meetings*

As a rule there are three ways in which UW instructors and occasionally tutors too have the opportunity to meet distance students: one of your students may visit the campus (or pass through Waterloo while on holiday), you may be able to go out into the field, so to speak, and visit a group or part of a class of students, or -- by far the most likely -- you will meet some of your students at the Correspondence Open House Day, held annually on campus and attended by several hundred tutors, students and instructors.

In your first tutorial tape you may like to suggest that should any of the class be visiting Waterloo you'd be glad to see him or her and to talk about the course over a coffee or a beer. Some departments are increasingly being visited by their correspondence majors, so be alert for visits by students you are tutoring. Often such visitors will very much appreciate your introducing them to other members of the department and some enjoy the opportunity to sit in on an on-campus class, to see how the other half lives. In any case your friendly hospitality often represents the first personal contact that your student has had with the University, so make sure s/he goes away with good feelings about UW.

If you would like to visit one of the regional study groups (see C.5.3) tell the Associate Director for Distance Education of your interest. You may perhaps be invited to participate in one of the visits made by UW personnel to various regional centres. As a rule, two or three people from the Correspondence Office and faculty make these visits once each term.

If you have to visit a community in which two or three of your students live, you may like to try arranging to meet them. Give yourself plenty of lead time to arrange this sort of meeting and don't feel unwanted if it doesn't work out. Many of your students study by correspondence because they prefer their privacy, even anonymity, and will not make any attempt to visit or even to contact you at all. Others very much value your academic response, but prefer no personal interaction. Again, the Associate Director for Distance Education would be glad to give you some ideas or advice if you plan to visit out of town students.

The Correspondence Reception or Open House Day has already been described briefly in B.6 above. It has recently been held in late September each year. This is an opportunity which each tutor and course author should take advantage of for meeting a large number of distance students. Almost certainly one or two of them will currently be registered in *your* course and will be hoping to meet you, so come along to the Open House and enjoy a lively and interesting day. Even if none of your own students is there, you will be able to talk to students and instructors about distance education courses.

C.3. The tutor-learner relationship

The role of the tutor in helping adult students learn most probably shifts as the course progresses. In fact, we may feel that it is desirable that it should change, since one of our most important goals as teachers is to encourage our students to develop independence and autonomy in their approach to learning. Every student is going to be individual in his or her reactions to the course content, the learning process and you, the helper-tutor, but each will to some degree feel some of the same emotions at each stage of the course.

For our purposes here, we should consider the start of the course, from the time when the student receives the course materials until the point when the first submitted assignment is returned; the central period of study, from the second to the last assignment's submission; the pre-exam period; and a brief post-exam aftermath.

C.3.1. *Introductions: beginning the course*

At the beginning of a new course, even experienced distance students commonly feel a little apprehensive. They wonder about their being able to handle the course content and the work load. They may feel concern about the tutor's style of marking and academic standards. They may even worry whether they can sustain enough interest in the subject matter or the course materials to complete the work successfully. They may find the course package confusing, or they may question whether their usual techniques for studying or for submitting assignments are going to be appropriate for a new discipline or a new instructor.

If even experienced students are apprehensive, the novice distance learner may well be really nervous. Not only is the whole activity a new one, perhaps one which the mature adult has not participated in for twenty years or more, but she may feel unsure of whether her skills are adequate for the demands of university level work, or he may be anxious about juggling the demands of studying, family and a job.

Some of your students may be excited and challenged by the new course materials, others may feel discouraged or overwhelmed, but you are not going to be able to intervene. Those important first interactions between the learner and the course will have taken place well before you come on the scene, since they are in the hands of the course author whose job was completed months earlier.

Your first chance to interact directly with the learners in your course is going to be in the first tutorial, that is, when you return their first assignments. (One or two may have written or telephoned you before this, but you will be unlikely to have responded to many of your students before the first assignment set arrives for marking.)

Experienced tutors suggest that the first tutorial should differ from later ones in several ways. Here are some important activities for your first tutorial:

- introducing yourself to the class and giving each student an impression of its size and makeup

- reviewing the course objectives, perhaps looking quickly ahead to the upcoming assignments to show how they are related to them

- commenting on the learning activities involved in the course work: note-taking, learning technical terms, reading the textbook, using self-assessment materials and so on

- sending a clear message to the students about *your* style: the demands you will make of them, your willingness to be responsive and supportive, your beliefs about the importance of accuracy, creativity, originality, mastery of detail, good English style -- whatever you think it is vital that any student should achieve if s/he is going to get the most out of this course

- being particularly tolerant of wide variation in more and less successful approaches to the first assignment: this will include constructive comments, praise for the good points even in a weaker assignment, guidance on areas for improvement, perhaps permission to resubmit one or two in a later time slot (if you feel special consideration is warranted)

- motivating and encouraging everyone to continue studying by reassuring those who are uncertain about their ability to progress in the course (some tutors will look ahead to later assignments, showing how success in the first one will relate to a more satisfying encounter with the next, or how an unsuccessful first attempt can be turned to good account in working on a later assignment, since a different emphasis or a change in approach can be tried out).

- suggesting productive ways to continue studying the course content: utilizing local resources, applying new knowledge to daily experience, finding a study-buddy, developing individualized ways of testing mastery of content or methods, reading more widely about the discipline in leisure time

- reducing any anxiety about each learner's ability to study *this* course with *you* as tutor by responding to each individual assignment and to the class as a whole as if you were opening doors for them, not closing them: positive, forward-looking, enthusiastic, sympathetic and confident comments are going to encourage them to put all their energies into interaction with the course content instead of into concern about how they will do on the next assignment or the final exam with you as their marker.

C.3.2. *The long haul*

After the novelty of getting the first assignment done, sent out and back home once more, your students may find that their interest in the course wanes a bit. The assignments may be more difficult, more material has to be mastered and remembered, note-taking becomes a chore, family irritation at the study time the course requires may grow. Whatever the reason, students often find that the first flush of enthusiasm wears out fast. Can we as tutors do something to help them in the long haul between the introduction to a new course and the completion of the last assignment? For many tutors, the answer is, not much. If your course has, not untypically, three assignments, then you are likely to have only two useful opportunities to help your students persist through the course: the first and second tutorials. The third tutorial will often seem to them rather an anticlimax, unless you have prepared them to look forward to it as a pre-exam helper, as we shall see (C.3.3).

The second tutorial of the typical three, then, carries most of the weight in encouraging your class not to give up. Anything that you can do to acknowledge and at the same time to counteract the sense of discouragement which easily can set in at mid-course is just great.

- Bring the problem of boredom and the central slump out into the open: admit it exists and that everyone suffers from it, 'good' and 'bad' students alike.

- Suggest some new approaches: new ways to compare previously learned theories, a recent novel to which course content is relevant, some informal field work using ideas derived from the course, anything which will bring a little excitement back to the discipline, now beginning to seem humdrum after six or eight weeks of hard work at it.

- Write an encouraging, informal, perhaps personal comment on every assignment you mark. Be humorous, quirky, human. Acknowledge each student's work as belonging to an individually interesting, worthwhile and likeable fellow-learner.

- Try to give some sense that you feel real empathy with the hard work and, for some, the actual struggle to persist. Congratulate everyone on having put so much effort and so much commitment into what they have done so far, and help them to look ahead to the new level of understanding they will have reached when the course is over.

- Promise them some useful advice on how to review, how to tie it all together, how to study for the exam successfully in the next (or the last) tutorial.

C.3.3. *The pre-exam stage*

The last tutorial you send out before the exam which will help the students to prepare for what is a real ordeal for some, and at least an anxious experience for most, is the one likely to be in Time Slot Five. Anything you return in Time Slot Six will only reach your class *at best* in the day or two before the exam is written. This important fact means that you must plan for your last useful tutorial carefully. For most courses, it is in Slot Five, for some, in Slot Four. In this tutorial, you may be able to do at least some of these helpful things:

- provide a quick overview of some of the main themes of the course, tying the topics together and emphasizing their overall relationships

- suggest some useful review and exam study techniques, reminding the students, for example, that maps, glossaries of technical terms, charts, outlines, summaries etc. which appear in the course notes or texts are excellent study aids

- reassure them that you have confidence in their ability to do at least as well on the final exam as in their assignments

- remind them to read through the exam paper from beginning to end before starting to write, and suggest that they should allot their time sensibly, leaving any questions they find more difficult until the end, but making sure they attempt each one. Remind them to read and hi-lite ALL the instructions on the exam paper.

(Since advice on exam writing is subject-specific to a certain extent, pass on to your students the techniques you have found successful for yourself in the past)

- consider whether you can usefully send a quick personal achievement summary to each student -- include the term mark, the improvements you have seen in the assignments, the strengths and weaknesses, any individual advice you may feel is appropriate ("Mary, if as you tell me you feel very unsure in giving precise dates, perhaps making your own time chart as you review for the exam will help to fix them in your memory.")

- wish them good luck and good studying and tell them that you have enjoyed tutoring their class before saying goodbye to them.

C.3.4. *Aftermath*

For some tutors, the marking of the exam scripts and calculation and submission of final grades is part of your responsibility. In such cases you may find that there are one or two students who want your support and advice at or even after exam time. Emergencies or problems of this sort are likely to be rare, but be prepared in case one of these should occur.

You may receive a panicky telephone call in the last day or two before the exam. This will need good judgement on your part. Remember that almost always students have *nothing to lose* by writing the exam. Do all you can to reassure them.

Point out that even the worst-case scenario (one failed course) is hardly a life-or-death matter, that many people find they do much better on the exam than they expect and are pleasantly surprised by their own success, that three hours of exam writing is comparable only with a visit to the dentist rather than to a medieval torture chamber -- in short, use a light touch, a reassuring confident tone, perhaps a little warm humour. Sometimes, all that the nervous learner really needs is a sympathetic ear for five minutes.

Quite another problem is posed by students with a sudden crisis to face. Illness or death of someone close to them, an accident, a sudden work emergency which could not have been foreseen, personal injury or illness, court legal proceedings or, in winter, dangerous weather conditions may all be good reasons for the student to apply for a deferred exam. In such cases, advise the student to contact the Correspondence Office (Student Services Manager or Exam Co-ordinator) *at once*. Tell the student *not* to attempt the exam at all, if you believe the circumstances are sufficiently serious, as it will be a much greater nuisance to set a second exam paper than to arrange for a deferred exam. For example, a student recently was involved in a car accident on the way to an exam centre. She attempted to write the exam, realized she had been more shaken up than was at first apparent, and could not finish writing. She would have been better advised not to attempt the exam at all, but to have requested deferment.

You may have a request from a student to have a final exam script returned. Usually, to do this is not a policy of UW instructors. You should check with your instructor or departmental correspondence adviser as to how you should handle such a request. As a rule, students are satisfied if you discuss their exam script with them in some detail, either in a letter or on the phone. (Don't ever simply return a marked exam script unless authorized to do so by your instructor.)

Lastly, a student may contact you after receiving his or her final grade. (This is about six to eight weeks after the exam has been written.) Keeping your marking folder with all the assignment and exam grades in it in an accessible place for three months after the course is over is a good plan, just in case some enquiry about final grades does come in to you. In any situation where an error does seem to have happened -- incorrect grades, missing assignment marks, no final exam script received and so on -- don't promise *anything* in haste to the student except that you will at once look into the problem and straighten it out. Any grade changes which are eventually called for will have to be submitted to the Registrar's Office and the Correspondence Office on the correct form. This is the responsibility, however, of your instructor or other faculty adviser in your department.

All in all, you will find that even the most accessible and warmly human tutors are not contacted by more than perhaps a quarter of the class at most, except possibly in certain particularly anxiety-provoking courses. Very few students will have serious problems to consult you about. Perhaps the most typical personal exchange between student and tutor looks much like this:

> Dear Marker,
> Sorry this HUM 212 assignment is a few days late. All my family has been sick with the flu and pressures at work meant I had to do some unexpected overtime. Sincerely, Jill T.
>
> Dear Jill,
> Thanks for your note. As you can see, your assignment's late arrival did mean I couldn't get to it at once, but I'm glad to say it was quite a successful piece of work in spite of the problems you mentioned you were having. Hope your family members are all well again. Looking forward to your next assignment, yours, Brenda P. (Tutor for HUM 212)

Reading Nine, The human dimension in Open University study, presents the results of some research, completed in 1986, to explore the students' perceptions of studying with the Open University (U.K.). This paper also emphasizes the human dimension as an essential aspect of distance learners' needs.

C.4. Some difficult situations

There are some difficult situations which you as tutor may realise that your students or you yourself are in. The four which follow have no particular interassociation, but have repeatedly come up in discussions among tutors and advisers in quite varied contexts. They are also difficulties which we have not so far looked at in any detail.

C.4.1. *Trapped between students and instructor*

Tutors need to remember that they are the interestingly nourishing filling in a rather odd sandwich, student (or class) and instructor being the slices of bread on either side! However, we all know that (once in a while) a better metaphor to describe the tutor's role is that it lies between a rock and a hard place. What do you do when you and your instructor do not see eye to eye?

It may be that your course author (your instructor) has presented the course content in ways which you find alien to your own approach to the subject. Sometimes you believe there are actual errors in the presentation. Yet any attempt to discuss this with your instructor has led nowhere, or so you feel. (A worst-case situation might see actual hostility between the two of you.)

A variant on this difficulty develops out of a defensive and annoyed student, who wants to make trouble for you by complaining about you to your instructor, or tries to get you to put right his or her dissatisfaction with the materials and, by implication, the course author.

Such problems are best regarded as interpersonal disagreements, and you will have to use all the skill you possess to emerge from them unscathed. Some recommendations might be

- above all, keep cool and never lose your temper, since logical and reasonable discussion is the only level on which academic differences should be settled
- be open-minded and fair to all three parties in the debate -- that is, include yourself but give equal time to the student's and the instructor's viewpoints
- admit error, or agree to differ or to compromise whenever these are acceptable ways out: there *are* various theories or interpretations, academics *do* differ in their opinions on the merits of an assignment, human beings *do* make mistakes...
- discuss your difficulties (always discreetly) with other tutors, as although it may be unethical to say too much some talk with a colleague may help you to think of an approach you have not so far tried
- *don't* go over your instructor's head (to a departmental chair, for example) except in the most serious circumstances imaginable. If you feel you have no other recourse, it is probably a better move to talk to either an Associate Dean or the Director of the whole program (the Director of TRACE), as you risk precipitating a departmental civil war, which will inevitably draw you deeply into it, should you lodge serious complaints within the department itself.

It is only fair to say that this particular problem is mercifully very rare. However, mild forms of it do occur, and should you be unlucky enough to be caught in such a trap, you are best to regard it as you would any three-way disagreement among sensible adults: that is, as best solved by honest discussion and ultimately, compromise. If your two co-workers still insist on being cantankerous and pig-headed, your only chance is to remain patiently reasonable in what will otherwise be most certainly a no-win situation.

C.4.2. *What your role is -- and isn't*

First and foremost, your role is that of an academic tutor. Instructors and academic tutors should only feel that their role includes any kind of non-academic counselling under very particular conditions. First, if you are generally not comfortable discussing personal problems, then this is probably not the time to start. Second, if you have no idea of the appropriate way to handle what your sixth sense suggests might be or become a serious matter, it is best to give your student information on how to find those who *are* trained in counselling procedures.

Those of us who are in the teaching business are used to giving information, perhaps more than is 'good' for our students in many cases. However, counselling often requires encouraging the clients to come to their own solutions. Your primary concern is the quality of the assignments submitted to you. Growing out of that concern is a certain responsibility for ensuring that the learner is being given every opportunity to master the material and to develop academically or intellectually. Your comments on the assignments and your tutorials are the only chance you will get to exercise this responsibility for almost all your students. But there may well be a few in your class who want and need more from you than this, as I have tried to suggest earlier in this discussion of communication between tutors and students. It is sometimes difficult to avoid becoming over-involved with students whose problems may be serious but are ones which are really not your responsibility. In any such case, you will find that these simple rules of thumb help.

- Don't try to counsel a really troubled student on anything but academic matters. Instead, suggest to him or her that there are others whose job it is to provide help (see C.5).

- Don't respond in a similar tone to requests or enquiries which are personal rather than academic *if you don't want to*. In any conversation or letter to a student, you have every right to respond only to the messages which *you* select as appropriate to your proper responsibility as academic tutor.

- Don't criticize the student or his or her work excessively. When giving feedback on assignments, avoid absolutes (e.g. "You always do this incorrectly/make the same mistakes.")

- Don't say what the student 'should' or 'shouldn't' do. Instead, lay out the alternatives as you perceive them, and let the student make the choices.

- Always remember that you are not in some old-fashioned teacher-pupil relationship, but that you are one adult with greater specific skills conversing with another adult less skilled in this precise course content. Then ask yourself how you normally interact with a peer who wants something from you, and behave accordingly.

C.4.3. *Hidden agendas*

Occasionally some student may contact you with an apparently straightforward question or request. Yet when you answer it, the enquirer still seems dissatisfied and persists in approaching you. What may be happening here is that there is a hidden agenda at work, one which very likely even the student who owns it is unaware of. In many cases, the student's difficulties are not going to lie in an area which you can do anything at all about. Sometimes you may feel that the hidden agenda is actually a form of resentment against you or your role as tutor, which the student is unwilling to express directly.

However, anxiety, apprehension, attention-seeking behaviour are normal human reactions to many kinds of inner tension. If you can read between the lines or listen to the unspoken messages you may be able to reassure your student about what is really troubling him or her. This is not, of course, an easy job for us tutors who have no professional counselling training or

skills. We often fear we can do harm, perhaps inadvertently make a bad situation worse. However, the professionals seem to agree that any adult with intelligence and goodwill can safely do these helpful things:

- listen, ask if you are getting the message right by rephrasing or repeating it, listen again -- and keep listening
- encourage your student to keep talking until he or she begins to formulate a solution -- our best answers are always the ones we finally find for ourselves
- respond as positively and as sympathetically as possible, letting your student see your unshakeable confidence that s/he will reach a constructive solution shortly
- learn all you can about the support system you are part of, so that like any true professional, you know whom to refer your student to for the sort of help you are not trained to offer.

C.4.4. *Why students drop courses*

The problem of why students drop courses is naturally of concern to anyone involved in education. Presumably a dropped course represents an unsatisfied customer. Or does it?

There are two groups of unhappy customers who drop out, not just one. One group regrets not finishing the course, but feels compelled to give it up, almost always for reasons which are virtually out of our control as tutors or course authors. Some change in their personal situation is suddenly demanding enough of the learners' time or energy that their priorities have to change. You may be able to suggest that alternatives exist -- sending in assignments late, a deferred exam, an INC (incomplete) grade, for example -- but experience tells us that there will still be students whose decision to drop out is firmly made, and that we cannot, and perhaps should not, interfere.

The second group of students who drop out is indeed a group of dissatisfied customers. They may dislike the course content or the way it has been presented to them, or they may dislike your way of tutoring.

Here you may perhaps do something to prevent some of the class from leaving it, although this is far from easy, as the first thing you are likely to know about it is simply that Barbara W's or Peter L's second or third assignment has not appeared. Two possibilities present themselves.

Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the course assignments, materials and content *before* the first assignment is due. Then be sure to mark each student's work in a way which is responsive to difficulties inherent in the course materials. Try to make allowances for topics treated in the textbook or the tapes in ways which you believe learners may find confusing. Supplement the course materials with some guidance in your first tutorial (or in later ones, for that matter). Foresee those parts of the course which easily discouraged students may despair over and anticipate their discouragement with help before they ask for it. Acknowledge that the course is difficult, that many of the class are concerned, and that you are nevertheless confident that everyone can successfully master the material. Offer your support at every stage, and sound as encouraging and approachable and non-threatening as you know how.

Secondly, you can participate in a 'rescue and retrieval' scheme in two ways. A blue card is routinely sent out from the Correspondence Office (See Appendix B.6.) to all students in each course who do not send in the first assignment. It is an easy job for you to add a personal touch to that notice, simply by signing it yourself. Even better is to write on it something like "Do get in touch with me if I can help you get started" or "Problems? Let me know if I can do anything to help." Best of all is to send a short note to accompany the blue card, expressing your hope as course tutor that you can help the learner to begin work on the course. (For further information about how these blue cards are used, contact the Manager of Student Services in the Correspondence Office just before the first assignments are due to arrive in your course.) The other way to attempt a rescue is appropriate at a later stage in the course. If you have a student who has already submitted one or two good assignments and then falls silent, you may want to send out a short enquiry. Don't probe or be officious, but again, offer your help if you can be of service. You will at least have the satisfaction of knowing you have done your best to support your students.

C.5. Counselling resources

As we have already seen, one of the marks of a first-rate tutor is the willingness to help the student to find the appropriate support s/he needs within the system or even, perhaps, outside it. There are a number of counselling resources available on campus to distance students.

C.5.1. *Being a good broker*

To act as a broker means to be a useful intermediary between customers or clients (in this case, your students) and a number of suppliers of their needs. The university obviously cannot supply the full range of individual needs, but it is reasonably well equipped to pass the student on to those who can help him or her, and also to respond to a fair number of problems itself.

Your role as tutor-counsellor is to understand and explain what the university system is capable of doing for the student in need.

When you first become aware of a problem, listen carefully to what the student is saying and decide whether the difficulty s/he is having is academic, administrative or personal. If it is an academic (course-or discipline-related) matter, first you and then your instructor (or other faculty member in your department) should be able to help. If it is an administrative matter, it may be either a problem for the Registrar's Office or the Correspondence Office to solve. In any case, if in doubt, put the student directly in touch with the Manager of Student Services in the Correspondence Office, or offer to consult the appropriate administrative staff member(s) yourself and to get back to the student with advice and/or a solution.

If the student's difficulty is a personal one, it is likely to take one of two very general forms. Either s/he needs academic advice about course or program choices or s/he needs some help which I have here called 'counselling support' in the widest sense of the words. For academic advice every student has an appropriate academic adviser, either in the particular Faculty or in a department, in the case of a degree-seeking student. A list of academic advisers appears each year in the 'Faculty Programs and Regulations' sections in the Correspondence Calendar. Refer your student to the right adviser, and at the same time refer him or her to the lists in the Calendar for future reference.

C.5.2. *Counselling Services*

If your student has a personal (but only incidentally academic) difficulty of some kind, you should suggest which of the counselling services on campus will be able to offer help. Again, there is a section in the Correspondence Calendar called 'Services for Correspondence Students' which you should be familiar with. Some of the people (and their extension numbers) you are most likely to want to refer your students to are:

The Correspondence Student Services Manager: ext. 3075 (or 519-888-4044)

The Mature Student Services Co-ordinator: ext. 2147

Counselling Services: ext. 2655

The Career Resource Centre: ext. 3001

The Writing Clinic: ext. 2329

The Co-ordinator of Services for Disabled Persons: ext. 4635

Under certain circumstances you will want to consult with one of these people (although it is unlikely that you will need to refer a student directly to any of them, at least in the early stages of a problem):

The Director of Teaching Resources and Continuing Education:
(Director of the Correspondence Program)
ext. 2579

The Associate Director of Distance Education:
ext. 2024

The Distance Education Advisor:
(Advises faculty members and tutors)
ext. 3132

The Associate Dean of each Faculty who is responsible for Special Programs, Continuing and/or Distance Education: see UW phone book, last pages

The Correspondence Course Services Manager:
ext. 2410

C.5.3. *Regional study groups*

In the past couple of years a number of regional study groups have been formed by and for distance students at UW. If any of your students live within travelling distance of a study group, they may find that the informal contact with other students is interesting and useful. You can obtain information about the organization and activities of these regional groups from the Continuing Education Liaison Officer at ext. 2003 (or from the Correspondence Student Services Manager, ext. 3075).

You may also be interested to know that any currently registered distance student can obtain, *on request*, a list of all other correspondence students, also currently or very recently registered at UW, who live in the requester's area (roughly the equivalent of his or her exam centre area) and who have agreed to have their names listed. Since your students may be unaware of this service (and it seems many still are) you may like to mention it in your first tutorial. (Requests for these regional lists should be addressed by the student to the Correspondence Office.)

C.5.4 *Community resources*

You are likely to realise after only a little contact with distance students that as a group they are remarkably self-reliant and inventive. Many of them have thought of and made excellent use of resources in their own communities which might well never have occurred to you. All the same, you may want to enquire whether one of your students who seems at a loss for resources or support has given his or her community enough thought.

Some of these community resources which distance students report using successfully are:

- local libraries and librarians (some provide extensive information and reference services)
- local high schools (libraries, librarians, individual teachers)
- local counselling services (when personal problems are putting their academic work at risk)
- local ministers, priests, rabbis, pastors (not only for personal problems, but for consultation on, for example, a Religious Studies course)
- local ethnic/language groups, who may have members who will be glad to tutor or simply talk over their own native culture, history or language
- enthusiasts and/or specialists in all sorts of fields who enjoy passing on their expertise as it relates in some way to course content
- community college services (libraries, vocational counselling, faculty members)
- local clubs or interest groups who may have members with expertise in, for example, local history, archaeology, music, the environment, municipal issues
- members of Parliament or Provincial Legislatures whose staff can be consulted on local or wider political issues
- the local newspaper offices and reporters
- senior citizens' groups.

Some students claim that advertisements for a study buddy in church magazines, supermarket or Ys' noticeboards, library bulletins or even local newspapers can result in useful contacts. Some

put their families and friends to use, making their latest assignment topic or textbook chapter the discussion focus for the family dinner table or a weekly coffee hour.

In a word, the student who claims that s/he is completely isolated may not really be as cut off from all sources of support as it seems at first. Most of them may be able with a little ingenuity to find someone in their own community with whom to talk over their course content if they wish.

One last word of warning: be careful not to confuse students who are in prison ('incarcerated'), in hospital or a similar institution, or either temporarily or permanently immobilized at home (sometimes called 'shut-ins'), with those who simply *feel* isolated. You may well have to modify your advice or provide more tutoring, or both, for the students who are genuinely isolated for one of these unusual reasons. Also, in the case of incarcerated students, assignment deadlines are sometimes a real source of difficulty; you may have to be a bit flexible and encouraging if they are not to drop out of your course.

Part Two

Selected Readings

ASSIGNMENT TYPES
and
INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

This chart suggests which types of assignment seem likely to develop certain intellectual skills in the learner. (You may like to fill out the first page yourself before comparing with the completed chart on the next page.)

Assignments / Skills	Assigned Essay topic	Self-selected Essay topic	Short Notes/ Short Answer	Identification/ Manipulation of Samples/data	Problem Sets/ Language Exercises	Case Studies	Observational Studies	Identification of central features	Book Reviews	Designs or other graphic materials	Journals	"Jackdaw" packages	Objective questions
Comprehension													
Application													
Analysis													
Synthesis													
Evaluation													
Exposition													
Deduction													
Citation of Evidence													
Balanced Assessment													
Aesthetic Response													
Control of Material													
Problem-Solving													
Logical Argument													
Statistical Analysis													
Creativity/ Originality													
Selectivity													

Skills \ Assignments	Assigned Essay topic	Self-selected Essay topic	Short Notes/ Short Answer	Identification/ Manipulation of Samples/data	Problem Sets/ Language Exercises	Case Studies	Observational Studies	Identification of central features	Book Reviews	Designs or other graphic materials	Journals	"Jackdaw" packages	Objective questions
Comprehension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	?	?	?	?	?
Application	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	✓	?	✓	?
Analysis	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?
Synthesis	✓	✓	?		✓	✓				✓		✓	?
Evaluation	✓	?	?	✓		✓	?		✓		✓	✓	?
Exposition	✓	✓	✓			?			✓	✓	✓		
Deduction	?	?		?	✓	✓	?	✓			?	✓	
Citation of Evidence	✓	✓				?			✓			?	
Balanced Assessment	✓	?		?		✓	✓	✓	✓		?	✓	
Aesthetic Response	?	✓	?				✓		✓	✓	✓	?	
Control of Material	✓	✓	?		✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	
Problem-Solving	?	?		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	?	✓	✓
Logical Argument	✓	✓		?	?	?			✓			?	?
Statistical Analysis				✓		✓	?	✓					✓
Creativity/ Originality	?	✓		?	?	?	?			✓	?		
Selectivity	✓	✓	✓	?		✓		✓	?	?		?	

S.B.P. Haag 1989 TRACE University of Waterloo

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Towards good teaching by correspondence

The work of tutors in receiving, considering, teaching, assessing and returning the written work of students is exceptionally important in the Open University. Teaching by correspondence is central and personal in Open University teaching. Half a million assignments are exchanged between students and tutors every year. Apart from a small number of introductory training documents, the latest of which is Teaching for the Open University, *little has been written and made nationally available on this essential element of Open University pedagogy. This paper is drafted by two Tutors and a Staff Tutor in the East Midlands, Sue Cole, Maggie Coats and Helen Lentell respectively.*

Sue Cole, Maggie Coats and Helen Lentell

Correspondence tuition is a central feature of the Open University teaching system. In planning two Social Science workshops on correspondence teaching in the autumn and winter of 1984–85, it therefore came as a great surprise to discover how little had ever been written about it, within the University. Apart from *Teaching for the Open University*, there was little guidance available to the tutor on the nature and purposes of correspondence tuition, or practical advice on how to achieve good teaching. So, it was decided to produce this paper, drawing on issues considered at the two tutor workshops and on more informal discussion with colleagues and students.[1]

This paper is based on various premises, perhaps the most fundamental being that correspondence tuition is not simply a matter of 'marking' or correcting students' work but is a major *teaching* medium. It involves teaching not only the particular academic content of a given course but also skills essential to undergraduate study. To achieve this a relationship must be established with the student in which teaching and learning can take place.

Furthermore, while this document focuses on correspondence tuition, it acknowledges that this cannot be seen in isolation; it is one element in a tuition system which (in addition to the written materials) involves face-to-face and other forms of contact (eg telephone). These other elements are of great importance in facilitating and reinforcing good correspondence teaching.

The student's perspective

The student perspective is examined first, as a reminder that correspondence tuition is essentially for the *benefit of the student*. This may seem obvious, but it is something that can be forgotten. Faced with a pile of scripts, there is always a danger of seeing correspondence tuition as a job of work which is completed when the assignments have all been dealt with. Yet the processed Tutor Marked Assignment is not the end of the story, the real outcome is the learning that takes place after it is returned to the student. So, correspondence tuition must start from an awareness of the student's perspective, for instance, what students themselves are likely to want and need from the correspondence exchange. This is the main question dealt with in this section. However, to set it in context, it is useful to begin by considering briefly the nature of Open University students and the circumstances in which they receive their correspondence tuition.

Unlike the majority of full-time students, Open University students are adult learners. Thus for many, the Open University is a second chance, and this creates problems of confidence that would not be usual in a conventional university setting. The majority of Open University students invest a great deal in their work: much of the self can go into producing an assignment. Awaiting the return of the work and the tutor's response to it is often a source of anxiety. Furthermore, when the script is returned it is not received in a face-to-face context, as would be the case on a full-time course, but in isolation. There is no immediate opportunity for discussion with the tutor or even with other students, to share feelings or resolve problems. An awareness of all this must be to the forefront in correspondence teaching.

What then do students want from correspondence tuition? Drawing on discussions with students and with colleagues who are themselves Open University graduates, some of the main things would seem to be:

- to have their work treated with respect;
- from an instrumental point of view:, to get the grades necessary to pass the course;
- fair and objective grading;
- an explanation and justification of the grade awarded;
- to know the significance of the grade (eg that 'C' is a good solid grade) and, when letter grades are used, to know where they come within the grade and if there has been an improvement even if the grade is the same;
- a clear indication of how they can improve both in terms of the specific question and more generally. This is particularly important to students who feel 'stuck in a grade';
- a sympathetic, friendly and supportive approach, indicating that the tutor is 'on their side';
- not to be talked down to or patronised;
- encouragement and reassurance about their own ability, but balanced with honesty, and thus –
- positive comments and not simply negative, critical ones;
- specific comments (eg indicating clearly the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment, giving useful references) not vague generalities;
- constructive criticism and advice (eg not simply to be told that they've gone wrong but in what way and

what to do about it, direct references to the course material to indicate where to find what they've missed/misunderstood, etc);
- full comments (in particular on the script itself) since these can be of value not only at the time but for revision purposes;
- in the case of the stronger student, 'to be challenged not just congratulated';
- clearly expressed and legibly written comments – not complex, confusing or unreadable advice;
- an opportunity and invitation to respond (eg at tutorials, by phone);
- a quick turnround: to get one TMA back before the next is due.

This list is neither exhaustive nor prioritised but it should indicate some issues to bear in mind in handling assignments.

One important point to remember is that the expectations outlined here are those of students with experience of the Open University system. The majority of students coming new to the Open University will base their expectations of correspondence tuition on past experience of 'marking' and the conventional teacher/pupil model. So, one of the initial tasks is to clarify the role of correspondence tuition in the Open University and the implications this has for the tutor–student relationship.

The tutor's perspective

In this section the emphasis shifts from the student's point of view to the tutor's task. The aim is certainly not to be prescriptive. Good correspondence tuition is not something easy to achieve. There is no definitive guidance that can be given; there are no hard and fast rules; there is no easy formula that ensures success! However, on the basis of discussion, it is possible to identify some overriding aims that tutors find it useful to keep in mind in correspondence teaching. At a more concrete level, it is also possible to outline what tutors consider good practice, useful strategies, important considerations and things better avoided, in pursuing these aims.

One consideration in beginning to think about good practice is that there may be differences between courses at different levels. Overall, however, what is suggested here would seem to apply at all levels of Open University study, though there are likely to be certain differences of emphasis. For instance, some aspects are likely to need particular emphasis during the foundation stage of the Open University career. Some specific examples of such differences of emphasis will be highlighted at relevant points.

Establishing the ground rules

About the correspondence tuition in general

Correspondence tuition in the Open University is very different from anything that most students are likely to have encountered before. So it is likely that they will have misconceptions about it, particularly at first. It is therefore important to teach students about the nature and purposes of correspondence tuition and how to learn from it, so that they can make the most effective use of it.

This can be done both through correspondence comments and at tutorials. It is particularly crucial that the 'ground rules' are laid down at foundation level, but these need to be reinforced at post-foundation level.

It needs to be made clear that:

- correspondence tuition is about teaching not just marking and correcting;
- lengthy comments on the script and summary form (PT3) are not an indication that the work is poor;
- it is important to spend time reading and reflecting on the comments;
- The Open University grading system may not correspond to grading systems that students have previously experienced (eg it should be explained that 'C' is a good, sound grade).

To further undermine any misconception of correspondence tuition as 'correcting', it is advisable to avoid red biro!

Breaking down students' conventional notions about teaching is also likely to involve establishing a new kind of tutor/student relationship – showing that it is not a matter of an all-knowing tutor dispensing wisdom, but a two-way relationship with tutor and student working together; that the tutor is a human being whose key role is to help them progress on the course and not an examiner figure, passing judgement and awarding grades.

About your own preferences

It can also be helpful to make clear your own personal preferences, eg whether you like wide margins left for comments or an extra sheet at the end of the essay; your attitude towards the use of the first person, etc. This can save students worrying unnecessarily about minor points of style/presentation.

Achieving fairness and consistency in grading

It is clearly important to try not to allow subjective feelings about students or knowledge about their previous academic backgrounds to influence grading (in either direction). Similarly, compensatory grading would be something to resist, eg giving an unrealistic grade because the student has had problems; has tried hard, etc. Grading purely for encouragement would seem generally inappropriate. However, on some courses at least, criteria for grading are gentler at first and progressively tighten as the year goes on, thus allowing the less competent students the chance to find their feet in the earlier stages.

At a more practical level, in the interests of consistency some tutors find it helpful to read through all the scripts on a particular question first, before marking. This also gives an indication of how students have actually coped with the question – since tutor notes, where provided, can sometimes be unrealistic in their expectations.

Structuring correspondence comments: the script and the PT3

In the Open University, tutors write their comments on both the script and a covering form (the PT3) which is also used to record their grade on the central computer file and is returned to students. Many tutors consider it most helpful to use the script for their more detailed comments and the PT3 for a broad summary or overview of the most important comments and advice to be conveyed.

For example, PT3 comments should usually cover the following:

1. A clear explanation of the overall characteristics of the essay, ie the major strengths and weaknesses in terms of both form and content.

2. A justification/explanation of the grade given (and where letter grades are used, an indication of where the work falls within the grade, eg 'This was a very good "C" '; 'Well up the grade'.)
3. A clear indication of how to improve, both as regards the specific question and more generally.

The general format favoured by many tutors is:

1. To begin with positive comments on the strong points of the TMA (indicating, emphasising and building on the strengths)
2. To follow with any constructive criticism necessary (examples of weaknesses and how to overcome them)
3. Finally to end on a high note, eg 'If you do . . . you will do better next time' 'A good essay – keep it up'.

Though the PT3 has been referred to as a broad summary or overview, this does not imply that it should involve vague generalisations. The comments need to be specific, and illustrated by direct references to the script/script comments/course material, etc.

As the course proceeds, it is also useful to try to tie in comments made with those on previous TMAs to give a clear indication of how the student's work is progressing and a sense of continuity.

It is important to remember that the PT3 is the University's permanent record of student progress. PT3s may be drawn on for references, etc, and so it is essential that they give an indication of students' progress.

One small practical point: since the PT3 is a form of summary, most tutors find it best to complete it after they have handled the script itself. The PT3, then, acts as an illustrative synopsis which should lead smoothly on to a consideration of the comments made on the script.

The script itself is the place for the more detailed and specific points. Here, particular issues requiring comment can be taken up as they occur. Although this is not to sanction verbosity or repetition, full comments here are appropriate, and for various reasons.

Firstly, script comments have different purposes, eg

- they give the student help at the time it is needed. Thus for instance, if there is a misunderstanding it may be necessary to give a full explanation in clear and simple terms, to ensure that the student will grasp the point;
- they are often returned to later for revision purposes. With this in view it may sometimes be appropriate (eg with the more competent student) to widen the discussion beyond the confines of the particular essay but, of course, with a proviso such as 'Of course this would not be relevant to this particular question, but you may be interested that . . . .

Secondly, full comments are also part of establishing a good tutor/student relationship. They indicate that the tutor cares and is trying to repay the effort the student has made. They show respect for the student's work. Students speak of being very hurt by 'non-marking', ie skimpy, even contradictory comments on the script/PT3 which indicate that their work has not been read properly.

Thirdly, on higher level courses, where there are fewer tutorials, correspondence comments can be the students' major source of feedback and exposure to alternative views. Some tutors on half-credit courses have also pointed out that, with fewer TMAs, more sometimes has to be conveyed on each one.

When full comments are made on the script it is, of course, important to prioritise, to indicate clearly on the PT3 what are the most important messages for the student. In some cases it may also be helpful to indicate that you are showing some ways of doing things, not *the* way.

Furthermore, to guard against full teaching comments appearing discouraging, some tutors find it useful to clarify their purpose, particularly in the early PT3s, eg

> 'I have made detailed comments on your essay script, not to be over critical, but to suggest how your essay could have been improved and also to raise some questions for you to think about.'
> or
> '. . . to show you how you might have presented some good ideas in a clearer way.'

As regards the format of script comments, there are two broad approaches favoured by tutors:

1. Some prefer to write their comments in the margin – because this has a sense of immediacy, perhaps making some final remarks at the end of the script.
2. Others make only their briefest comments in the margin ('Good point', 'Nice one') and give the fuller comments in the form of footnotes on a separate sheet, which students can consult alongside the essay. This has the advantage that comments are easy to refer to on the PT3, eg 'See my note (3) on the script.'

Clearly both approaches have their advantages – there is no 'right answer' here.

Whatever the format used, some tutors point to the value of making at least some remark at the end of the essay itself – as a response, an acknowledgement of the overall effort, eg 'Well done, this was a great improvement', 'A thoughtful piece of work', or whatever.

A note on student and tutor notes:[2]

Where given, tutor notes should be a useful source of material, ideas and references, making clear what the intentions of the assignment are and what might be covered in a good and weak script. As such they should take some of the 'donkey work' out of tutoring, for instance, helping in the framing of PT3 and script comments. However, they are not a rigid or prescriptive statement as to what should be included in an essay, so tutors should not be constrained by them.

Where student notes are provided, it is important that tutors' comments should not contradict the advice these give to students, without some clear justification and explanation.

Creating a dialogue

In order that students get the most out of correspondence tuition, good tutors consider it important to create an ongoing sense of dialogue which helps the student to learn. Teaching/learning becomes a two-way process in which tutor and student are working *together* in a relationship of *mutual* respect.

Establishing a rapport through the written word is obviously not easy but it can be achieved.

The PT3 is particularly important in beginning to set up this sense of dialogue, since it is usually the first thing that the student will read. The tone of comments is very important in the absence of other cues that would be available in face-to-face contact, ie being friendly, supportive, understanding, sensitive, giving encouragement, and so on. The opening comments are especially important since they set the tone of the exchange. Hence,

for instance, the value of beginning with positive comments since they help to establish good contact.

Some tutors also find personalisation helpful in establishing a friendly relationship. For example:

- beginning the PT3 'Dear Mary . . .' or 'I very much enjoyed reading this piece of work, Mary' and ending with a signature, 'Best wishes . . .', 'Take care . . .';
- introducing such remarks as 'I'm glad you are now over your 'flu', 'Hope you had a good holiday'.
  (This approach also shows the student that the tutor knows whose assignment he or she is commenting on!)

A sense of dialogue can also be captured in the script comments which can act as a form of 'running commentary' and discussion with the student on specific points. One tutor signalled this on the PT3 as follows:

> 'I've put a number of comments on the script. This doesn't indicate that a lot needed changing, it's more in the way of a dialogue with you, over certain points.'

Whether on the script or PT3, comments which give a sense of working together, of respect for the student's work and views, and which invite a response are very helpful. Some examples may help to illustrate this:

- for instance, in conveying a sense of working together, and of mutual respect, use of questions can be helpful after making a point eg '. . . What do you think?', '. . . Would you agree?'. So too can turning suggestions into questions, eg 'Good point – would it have helped to develop it through an example?'; or using tentative and sensitive phrasing such as 'Perhaps an example would have helped to clarify this point', or 'Let's have a look at how this could have been handled differently . . .';
- in inviting a response, tutors use comments such as 'Let me know if you have any queries', 'I'd like to know what you think of these suggestions'. Some tutors suggest that comments putting the onus for any difficulties on them rather than students are particularly useful in encouraging a response. For example 'If you feel I've misunderstood what you were trying to say, then please have a chat about it', 'If anything is unclear . . .'.

Remarks that show that the tutor is human can also help in creating a rapport: eg 'I still find organisations the most difficult part of writing essays, but it does come easier with practice.'

On the other hand, things to avoid would include talking down, mystifying, creating a sense of distance, being patronising, and so on.

Other forms of contact such as tutorials and 'phone calls are, of course, *very* important in fostering and reinforcing a good relationship and sense of dialogue, and in providing the opportunity for students to respond to correspondence comments.

Helping students to improve

One of the most frustrating things for any students is desperately wanting to improve but having no idea how to achieve this. (One tutor refers to this feeling of being 'stuck in a grade' as the 'C' syndrome, ie always getting a 'C', desperately wanting a 'B' and now knowing how to get it. So correspondence tuition must show students how they can improve not only as regards the specific essay but in their future work.

It is important to remember that students need help not only in getting to grips with course content but also in developing skills necessary for university level study. As far as the teaching of skills is concerned there are likely to be differences of emphasis at different levels of study. For instance, at foundation level more groundwork is generally necessary in basic study skills such as essay writing techniques and conventions. By higher levels (particularly third), tutors are likely to assume that such basic skills have in the main been acquired. However, good tutors still try to develop and refine these skills (eg encouraging students to produce an argument that flows well), and there will always be less competent students who 'slip through the net'. Also, at higher levels there may be more attention to the development of critical and analytical skills and, of course, skills demanded by the particular subject/discipline may have to be taught.

In giving students positive and constructive help, perhaps a less obvious aspect is the need to emphasise and develop the *strengths* of the student's work. It is as important to reinforce what is going right and can be pursued as to indicate what the problems are. Not only is this encouraging and reassuring, but it helps to build on what is good in the student's work, eg:

> 'I particularly liked the way you . . .'. 'Good use of . . .'. 'Nicely expressed.'

In dealing with problems and weaknesses and how to overcome them, it is important not only to suggest what the student might do, but also to teach *how* to do it. Concrete and practical advice on how something might be done/argued/structured, etc, is of great assistance (particularly when a student is struggling). In some cases this might even involve suggesting an alternative plan drawing on the student's own work, or rewriting a passage. Similarly, direct references to course texts, etc, are helpful to show where to look for something that has been omitted or perhaps misinterpreted.

It is also worth remembering that when suggesting points that a student should have included, it is helpful to indicate what might have been omitted or condensed to keep the essay a reasonable length.

On the other hand, something to avoid is the one-word-marginal, whether negative or interrogative, such as 'Why?', 'How?', or 'Rubbish!' This only indicates that the student has gone wrong but not how or what to do about it. Similarly longer open-ended questions can be dangerous, where no suggested answer is provided or indicated (eg 'What do you think Marx/Weber meant here?'). The student may give an answer, but a wholly inaccurate one, and have no way of knowing this! In general it is probably better not to leave anything ambiguous. (However, the open-ended question may sometimes be a useful device in stretching the abler student, we comment on this below.)

In suggesting how students might improve in future work it can be helpful to move from the specific to the general. For example, if the problem is weakness in structure and organisation, PT3 comment might go something like . . .

> 'The essay would have been even more effective if it had had a clearer structure. For instance you might have . . . So next time, why not try . . .'

Where the student does show signs of improving and trying to follow advice previously given it is important to highlight and reinforce this. On the other hand where advice is consistently ignored and serious problems are repeated (eg plagiarism, failure to answer the question), it may be necessary to take a firmer line in comments or even grades.

One further point to bear in mind about improvement

is that where courses have letter grades, it is possible for a student to progress considerably but still remain in the same grade band. To avoid discouragement in such cases, it is helpful to explain this phenomenon and to indicate, through comments, that progress is being made. (*Plus or minus should not be added to the grade on the PT3 form.*)

Two final thoughts here: firstly, whatever the comments, it is obviously essential that they should be expressed clearly and unambiguously and in terms that the student can understand, and written as legibly as possible. Students can hardly benefit from teaching that they are unable to read or comprehend. Secondly, reasonably quick turnround should be aimed for as far as possible, so that students have a chance to learn from advice and put it into practice for next time. (Obviously there can be real difficulties here on courses where TMAs are badly spaced – course teams please note!)

Treating the student as an individual

In facilitating learning and development, there is a need to recognise that all students are different, and therefore, to treat each student as an individual. Tutors need to get to know their students as individuals – what they are like, where they are academically and so on. Teaching can then be adjusted to a student's particular needs, personality, competence, etc, both in terms of level and style/tone of comment. For example, issues which might usefully be raised with a more able student might simply be confusing for a less competent one. Similarly, comments that one student would take happily, might upset another. The aim must be to develop each student from where they are.

Obviously, tutorials, phone calls, etc, are very important in getting to know students personally. Just as it helps tutors to know who their comments are intended for, it equally helps students to be able to visualise who the comments are coming from! This is one of the areas where the post-foundation tutor has greater difficulties, because tutorial provision is much more limited. It can take longer and perhaps more effort to get to know students. Good higher level tutors stress the importance of encouraging all students to attend the first tutorial and where possible, phoning those unable to attend, to establish a pattern of contact.

In actually approaching particular TMAs, it helps to think in terms of handling Anne's essay or Peter's rather than simply an essay. Turning back to previous PT3 and to any notes made about the student's work can be a useful reminder of the person and their particular situation, where necessary.

Some tutors refer to the value of trying to 'get into the student's head', ie trying to see what the student was thinking and was trying to do when he or she produced the assignment. One tutor who adopts this approach describes it as a 'learning model' as opposed to a 'teaching' approach which might be 'more inclined to view an essay from the outside, from the tutor's perspective and evaluate it primarily in terms of an "objectively" good answer'.

In framing TMA comments it is also important to remember that these are written for the student, not the monitor[3] or other colleagues. So, here again it helps to think yourself into the student's position, eg 'Would they find this helpful?', 'What will best help this student?'.

In discussions of the need to relate correspondence teaching to the needs of the student, two particular problems are frequently raised – how to handle the 'weak' student and the 'good' student. *These terms are used merely for simplicity and do not imply pigeon-holing and categorising students – the very opposite of what is being suggested here!*

The weak student

Here, it is important always to try to find something to praise, even if you have to search for it. Encouragement and support are essential.

In dealing with the problems, some tutors stress the importance of not overwhelming the student. In all correspondence tuition some selectivity has to be exercised, since it is not feasible (or perhaps desirable) to comment on everything. This is even more so with the weaker student, where it might sometimes be sufficient to pick out just a few main issues to focus on, in a piece of work. On the other hand, some tutors rightly point to the possible dangers of letting a problem go unremarked that might be repeated ('Why wasn't I told that before?', etc) Furthermore, many weak students clearly do need all the help and guidance they can get. So, there is a balance to be struck here and ultimately, knowledge of the particular student must influence the approach adopted. And, of course, if students have been taught to learn from correspondence teaching, the likelihood of simply being overwhelmed, rather than of benefiting from it, should be minimised.

Where work displays a lot of problems, correspondence teaching should ideally be supplemented by a face-to-face session, to discuss how it might be improved.

Help also needs to be offered for the future. For instance, the student could be encouraged to get in touch when planning the next TMA to have a chat about it, *or* asked to submit a written plan with the next assignment. While correspondence comments show students how to improve their work are essential, they may also need active encouragement to practice what has been suggested.

The good student

Many tutors admit to finding it more difficult to handle the 'good' student than it is to help the weaker ones. Clearly it is not adequate simply to grade the work and give a few words of praise and encouragement. Worse still is to 'nit-pick' – finding something to criticise just for the sake of saying something.

Praise and reassurance are certainly necessary – even the most able students can lack confidence, underestimate their ability, and need reassurance that they are on the right track. However, the tutor also needs to respond with thoughts, ideas and questions which will stretch and challenge the student. The idea would seem to be, to strike a balance between being encouraging on the one hand, and on the other being thought provoking – stimulating the student to think further, and perhaps come back to discuss and debate issues.

One point worth remembering is that, in handling work in this way, it is advisable to make clear *why* you are doing so, ie to make clear that some issues are being raised *not* because the student was expected to include them in the particular essay, but in order to stretch them and take them further (perhaps in preparation for higher level study). The student should not then have the feeling of being 'put through hoops'.

In stretching the able student, correspondence comments can be used in various ways including:

- to point up issues that the student may not have considered, eg 'This was a good point – have you thought about . . .', 'You might be interested to know that . . .', 'It's beyond the scope of this particular essay but you might like to think about . . .';
- to suggest alternative approaches to an essay or highlight alternative views, eg in a discuss-type

essay where a student has taken a particular line, the tutor might develop other perspectives.
- to relate the particular piece of work to other areas of the course or themes running through it: to broaden out and bring out interconnections.
- to suggest further reading if appropriate, eg on higher level courses, tutors sometimes refer students to what they themselves are currently reading or working on – to highlight the latest issues and debates, etc.

This is also one area where the use of open-ended questions, without an answer provided, can sometimes be appropriate – where the purpose is to provoke thought and there is no clear-cut answer, eg:

> 'Have you thought of the implication of . . .?', 'Can you think of an example of . . .?', 'What sort of evidence would you need to support this view?'.

Good students comment that it is very easy for the essay to become the *end* of the learning process. There is a tendency to regard a good essay as the final word on the subject, perhaps the definitive answer, and to get locked into their own way of thinking. So it is very important for the tutor to use the essay as a way forward – to open up and broaden out the issues again, not to close them off.

Remembering the emotive aspect of TMAs

In correspondence teaching there is a need to be aware that students have *feelings* as well as brains. The majority put a great deal of themselves into their work and so the TMA exchange inevitably has an emotional element. Feelings of anticipation, dread, relief, disappointment, anger, despair, can be aroused. Such feelings can influence the learning process. For instance, if too much negative feeling is aroused by the tutor's comments, the students may be unable to learn from them (and indeed may not even go on to read them all).

This is a problem area that tutors need to acknowledge. There is no easy answer to it, but the relationship you set up, what you say and how you say it are obviously important. For instance, since most correspondence teaching involves at least some criticism of the student's work, tutors need to be sensitive to the tone of comments and diplomatic in phrasing, so as not to cause unnecessary hurt or demoralisation. This is particularly crucial on the PT3 as this is usually what students turn to first. It is worth asking 'How is the student likely to respond to receiving these comments?'

Where the grade is likely to disappoint or upset, some tutors feel it helpful to offer some sort of explanation and reassurance to soften the blow, eg where the grade is a bare pass:

> 'It was a very difficult question . . . it is a *pass*',

or where it is a fail:

> 'Put this one down to experience', 'Don't be too discouraged'.

Where the grade is lower than usual:

> 'Perhaps this was not so much your topic'.

It is certainly best to avoid such things as being too negative, using sarcasm and making abrupt, terse comments that could be interpreted as rude. Other practices which can cause unintentional hurt and so are probably better avoided include:

- crossing through chunks of the student's work, which may signify a lack of consideration for their efforts.
- making assumptions, eg 'You obviously haven't spent enough time on this TMA', 'You needed to give much more thought to . . .'. The student may in fact have expended considerable time and thought, despite appearances to the contrary. There is usually an alternative way of putting over the same point, with a little thought, eg a more tentative approach. 'Perhaps you didn't . . .', or the positive rather than the negative: 'If you spend relatively more time on planning your next essay, I'm sure you'll produce even better results . . .'.

Another point to remember is that Open University students are adults and are likely to react badly if they are not treated as such. Where the tutor's full-time post involves dealing with younger students, some change of approach may well be necessary.

Some final thoughts on this area:

1. With the best will in the world it is impossible to ensure that students will always interpret TMA comments as intended and not read 'hidden messages' into them (eg 'I'm no good really'). For example, comments that were in no sense intended to be patronising may be read as such. However, even if unintended problems occur, all need not be lost. The point can be made to students that if their reactions to TMA comments are ever initially hostile, it is worth coming back to them later, when they have worked through their feelings and thought about it a bit more.

2. There may well be a need to recognise a distinction between initial and considered responses in the correspondence exchange, eg while brief comments on an essay may seem encouraging at first sight, on reflection the student may find that they learn little from them. On the other hand, fuller comments may seem disheartening in the first instance, but should prove much more useful in the long run.

Similarly, certain messages may work in opposite emotional directions; for instance, being encouraging on the one hand but fair and honest on the other. However, while students obviously want to see initially positive responses and be encouraged by them, they would not really want or expect false optimism.

Of course, acknowledging this distinction between the initial and the considered response is no excuse for the tutor to be tactless, brutal or stand-offish.

3. The need to support and nurture students may tend to be particularly associated with foundation level. Certainly, the majority of students embarking on their Open University career are lacking in confidence, and those moving to a second foundation course often need help in making the adjustment. However, it must be remembered that *all* students, at whatever level, have feelings and are likely to find criticism hurtful. In addition, it should be borne in mind that many students can find the transition from one level of study to another pretty traumatic, especially foundation to second level. So, higher level tutors do need to handle the earlier TMAs with particular sensitivity. For example, one second level tutor began a student's first PT3, Grade 'D':

> 'This essay is a useful and competent start to the course. As long as you view this as a basis on which to build your future work, you should have few problems with the course.'

Another tutor commented on a 'C' grade assignment:

> 'I'm sorry you were worried about this TMA because, as you can see from the grade, it was perfectly sound.'

Encouraging a sense of independent study

One difficulty with courses that involve prepackaged and often predigested material is that students are in danger of soaking it up uncritically. At worst this manifests itself in pure plagiarism and regurgitation. It is, therefore, important to encourage students to process material for themselves, whenever possible, and to approach it critically (though without undermining enthusiasm) – since this is essential for university level study. In terms of correspondence teaching this might involve, at one level, not only actively discouraging plagiarism, but also giving credit to those who show signs of thinking for themselves. Insightful work should be encouraged and rewarded even where it is not totally successful. At another level, where the student is already more capable, there is a need to reward and praise work that goes beyond what might normally be expected, as well as showing how to take it further, so that the student develops confidence in their own judgement. This has already been touched on in the context of the 'good student'. However, while autonomy is something normally linked with the more able and competent student, it is worth remembering that even the work of students who have not yet fully mastered the basic skills, can begin to exhibit indications of insight and critical judgement that can be encouraged.

With this in mind it is useful to make clear, for instance, that study skills advice should not be regarded as highly prescriptive and that student notes, where provided, should not be seen as something to be adhered to rigidly, but rather as possible guidelines. As ability and confidence grow, students need to feel free to develop their own approach, their own written style, their own lines of argument and so on, within the confines of their course. (In addition to correspondence comments, tutorial discussions can be helpful here, eg in exploring alternative approaches to questions. Also useful is encouraging students to exchange essays – after the event – to see different treatments and styles. This can also help weaker students to improve; aid revision, etc.) Clearly, pure personalisation and idiosyncracy that neglects the basics of form and content cannot be sanctioned or encouraged. However, within the constraints of following a formal educational course, there is scope to encourage those who are moving towards greater autonomy.

Thus an aim of correspondence teaching is to generate competence and confidence in *all* students, so that they become less reliant on guidance and advice, and more independent and autonomous in the learning process. Autonomy, however, does not imply that students should not need the support, advice and stimulus to be gained from contact with a tutor and other students. A dialogue is essential at *all* levels of study, but at the same time, students should feel gradually more able to take responsibility for their own performance.

The value of good teaching

It is hoped that this discussion of correspondence tuition has given some food for thought and has not made the whole process seem too daunting! Teaching through correspondence, as opposed to just 'marking' or 'correcting' is not easy. As has been seen, it can involve some delicate balancing of differing and often conflicting demands, which no one can really be taught how to achieve. This simply comes with experience, practice and judgement, and all tutors, however experienced, do sometimes make errors of judgement. Furthermore, in many areas there is certainly no one 'right' answer – tutors have to develop their own style and approach, but perhaps this paper will have given some useful pointers. Clearly, good correspondence tuition is demanding and time consuming, but in view of the benefit that students can gain from it, it is worth the effort.

References

[1] Grateful thanks go to all the tutors and students who contributed their thoughts in the production of this paper.
Tutors:
Ivan Adler, Dez Allenby, Alison Andrew, Eddie Ashbee, Linda Bell, Juliet Bishop, Lucy Bland, Marilyn Boland, Alan Clarke, Chris Cooper, Alan Dyas, Tony Fitzgerald, Gill Goodchild, Pauline Harris, Greg McLennan, Sally Motley, John Muncie, Barbara Preston, Majlis Saiks, John Spencer, Diane Watson, Ruth Watts.
Students:
Various students in the East Midlands and beyond – too numerous to mention individually.

[2] On some undergraduate courses, students are provided with guidance on how to answer the set assignments. Tutors are usually also provided with 'tutor notes' which should help them grade and comment on scripts.

[3] A sample of the scripts of all tutors is selected and read by another Open University teacher in the same faculty, in order to check the grading and comment on the adequacy of the teaching provided by the tutor.

From Cheryl K. Cranley, Guidelines for Creating and Supervising Distance Education Courses. Centre for Continuing Education and Part-time Studies, Laurentian University, Sudbury, 1986, pp. 34-37. Reprinted with permission.

COMMENTING ON STUDENTS' ASSIGNMENTS

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of your written comments on students' work. In the absence of face-to-face contact, written communication is the central means of maintaining a personal relationship and thus closing the gap between you and your students.

The extent to which that relationship will be mutually satisfying depends largely on how you--and your students--perceive your role as course supervisor. If you see yourself as only an assessor, neither of you will benefit much from the relationship. Certainly, part of your responsibility is to assess the students' academic performance; but, in addition, it is up to you to communicate your support of them as individuals. Comments that point out inadequacies in assignments should therefore be written in a friendly, supportive tone. Friendliness does not jeopardize learning; on the contrary, it promotes academic success by creating a positive and productive student-teacher relationship. A simple device like addressing students by name and closing your comments with your signature adds a personal touch and helps overcome the alienation often felt by distance learners.

Generally speaking, productive comments serve two main purposes:

> they diagnose and explain the strengths and weaknesses of the students' work; and
>
> they offer guidance and encouragement for correcting errors and improving performance.

When diagnosing weaknesses in assignments, be specific. Comments like "You don't understand the topic" and "You haven't answered the question" serve no useful purpose. Passages in the students' work that suggest a misunderstanding of the topic must be pointed out, and the nature of the error must be explained. If the question is not answered, the problem should be identified precisely. For example, if the assignment calls for an explanation of the effects of an event and students deal only with what actually happened, the distinction should be made clear to them. To understand the weaknesses in their work, students must know not only <u>what</u> the problems are but also <u>why</u> they are problems.

In addition, students need advice about how to correct the weaknesses in their work. Unless you provide them with clear guidelines for improvement, they will feel frustrated and discouraged by your negative criticism. If they are to respond positively to your comments, they must recognize that your purpose is not just to identify inadequacies but rather to provide constructive criticism that will help them avoid problems in future assignments.

When offering suggestions for improvement in the next assignment, you should probably identify no more than two or three areas. Otherwise, students may consider the task unmanageable. This means that if an assignment contains many weaknesses, you will have to ignore minor problems in favour of commenting extensively on fundamental misconceptions. Students may then concentrate on strengthening their performance in the limited number of areas you address. If explaining weaknesses requires more commenting than seems reasonable, consider telephoning students. As well as being an effective way of discussing problems, phone conversations save you--and your students--from having to face lengthy written explanations.

Once in a while, to avoid repeating lengthy explanations, you may have to forward copies of your comments to students whose work contains similar problems. However, because this way of communicating is impersonal, it should be used to supplement rather than replace comments addressed to individual students.

Assignment assessment sheets are another means of supplementing your comments. These sheets identify the specific criteria used in evaluating assignments and provide a rating scale for measuring the degree to which these criteria are met. Those who support their use argue that assessment sheets speed up the marking process by removing the need for extensive comments. They also argue that these sheets benefit students by sharpening their awareness of the criteria used in evaluating, by helping to explain the grade attached to assignments, and by identifying specific areas where improvement is needed. Undoubtedly, providing this information in assessment sheets is better than not supplying it at all. But you should not rely on them entirely because the kind of impersonal feedback these sheets allow for is quite unlike the friendly, conversational comments students value.

Your response to the initial term-work assignment is especially important. If the work does not meet passing standards, allow students to redo the work if your schedule permits; otherwise, discount it in favour of attaching greater weight to future submissions. Either way, return the assignment with encouraging and constructive comments--but do not attach a grade. Receiving an F at the outset may cause some students to feel discouraged to the point of withdrawing from your course, even if they have already proven their ability in other courses. These students may simply move on to other courses. But students enrolled in a university course for the first time may be affected much more seriously if they receive a failing grade at the outset. Their confidence may be destroyed to such an extent they will abandon, altogether, the idea of pursuing a university degree.

The assignments that are, perhaps, most difficult to respond to are those that are neither exceptionally well nor poorly written. They are simply "adequate." When faced with these assignments, you may find yourself searching not only for qualities to praise but even for errors serious enough to deserve

your attention. You know you must respond with comments of some significance, but what can you say? There is no easy answer, but one solution may be to have on hand a variety of comments that explain the difference between adequate and above-average performances. These comments might offer suggestions for writing more interesting assignments. They might encourage students to look beyond the obvious in order to discover the broader significance of ideas, or they might suggest alternate ways of applying the ideas or principles in the course materials. Sometimes, it may even be appropriate to comment on stylistic matters. Quite often the level of interest in written work is reduced by wordiness, worn-out expressions, and the overuse of compound sentences. It is difficult to generalize about the type of comments that will suit your course; but if you have a list of your own to refer to, you may find responding to adequate assignments a little easier.

Fortunately, some assignments do not require a search for qualities to praise. But even here, care must be taken to ensure your comments are useful. Above all, be specific. While students will be encouraged by phrases like "Well done" and "Excellent work," they will be uncertain about how to achieve a similar level of performance if they do not know what particular qualities are being praised. For this reason, you should identify the especially strong passages in the students' work and note the qualities that contribute to their strength. Specific praise has another advantage. If you regularly offer general comments like "Good work," students may come to expect them and be disappointed when they are missing. On the other hand, comments that address specific strengths are less likely to create expectations of this nature because they are more varied. Keep in mind, too, that students who perform exceptionally well may want to know how they can do even better. Therefore, you should identify, for them, at least one specific area for improvement.

Commenting on students' assignments is a time-consuming and sometimes tedious task. Often you may wonder if students appreciate your responses to their work, while they may not realize how much effort goes into producing constructive criticism on stacks of assignments, distance learners do value your comments. You may also wonder how much effect your comments have on students. Their performance may sometimes suggest, too little. But regardless of how they perform, keep in mind that students will likely consider your words the measure of their academic success.

HANDOUT A: MARKING GUIDELINE

Mechanics: A minimal paper will reveal at least an adequate grasp of mechanics. An average paper will reveal a good grasp of mechanics an excellent paper will reveal a mastery of them.

Marking Guideline

	Material	Organization	Style
EXCELLENT	Clear and penetrating ideas. Mature grasp and assimilation of subject. Accurate documentation.	Clear focus, thesis is provocative or original. Clear and purposeful development. Rich in detail, rigorous in reasoning. Smooth transitions.	Diction clear and concise, revealing concer for reader and delight in language. Varied, rhytnmical sentence. Appropriate tone, pointed emphasis.
GOOD	Clear and interesting ideas. Good grasp of subject with some omissions. Accurate documentation.	Clear and specific focus. Direct and adequate development. Sufficient but limited details, sound reasoning. Adequate transitions.	Diction appropriate and accurate. Varied and appropriate sentences. Tone generally appropriate; emphasis apparent rather than pointed.
FAIR	Clear ideas. Grasp of subject but assimilation incomplete. Accurate documentation.	Thesis clear but simple or insufficient. barely sufficient details, occasionally faulty reasoning. Some awkward transitions or gaps.	Diction limited or wordy. Occasional sentence variety. Tone and emphasis not always appropriate.
POOR	Confused thoughts. Little or no documentation.	No focus, insufficient details, faulty reasoning, no transitions.	Awkward and faulty language.

NOTE: To be considered excellent, a paper should have received an excellent rating in each of the three categories; to pass, a paper should have received at least a fair rating in each category.

From Ralph Krueger, Geography Dept., University of Waterloo
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Letter Grades and What They Mean

	Outstanding	
A+		The student has demonstrated excellent and unusual understanding of the subject matter. This normally includes the capacity to analyse, strong evidence of original and sound critical thinking, an extensive familiarity with the literature, and an ability to express knowledge in a highly effective manner.
A	Excellent	
A-		
	Very good	
B+		The student has shown a thorough and above average understanding of the subject matter. This normally includes the capacity to analyse and think critically, general familiarity with the literature, and an ability to express knowledge in a competent manner.
B	Good	
B-		
	Competent	
C+		The student has demonstrated an average or adequate understanding of the subject matter, and has shown the ability to consider, apply and communicate basic aspects of the course content.
C	Satis-	
C-	factory	
	Fair	
D+		The student has demonstrated some evidence of understanding the subject matter but shows little ability to communicate or apply that understanding effectively.
D	Poor	
D-		
	Weak	
F+	Inade-	The student has demonstrated inadequate or fragmentary understanding of the subject matter or has failed to meet the course requirements.
F	quate:	
F-	failure	

Note: the interpretation of letter grades is not a matter of general agreement. This version, 'Letter grades and what they mean', is a composite of various authors' attempts to define letter grades; it is intended only to provoke further thought and discussion.

S.B.P. Haag 1989 TRACE University of Waterloo.

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Adults in Teaching and Learning

As correspondence instructors we need to consider the characteristics of adult learners carefully, whether we are course authors working on preparation and revision of our materials, or course tutors reading and commenting on our students' assignments.

In the last fifty years to a hundred years there have been some tremendous shifts in awareness of and attitudes towards various types of learning experiences. Mr. Gradgrind's view of the young as empty mugs that stubbornly resist filling with facts--with total disregard for their relevance to daily life and its demands--has almost (not quite) vanished. Without exploring here the range of twentieth century pedagogical theories, let's consider the recent developments in what has come to be called andragogy*, that is, the theory and practice of adult education.

First, a rapid review of current terms. Here in Ontario, as in many parts of the world, education comes in two basic types, compulsory (for the under sixteens) and post-compulsory (for young to old adults). Post-compulsory education comprises formal, informal and non-formal learning (Verduin, 1986). These correspond generally to our post-secondary institutions (universities and colleges offering degrees, diplomas or certificates), self-directed individual or small-group self-planned learning activities, and the vast area which lies between: courses and programs for adults in the workplace, the leisure centres, the schools and so forth which generally centre on the learning experience itself rather than on any accreditation for it.

It is the last of these three which has tended to attract the most labels. Formal learning for adults has most often in the past been designed to serve the young adult, but is now increasingly offered on a part-time basis to mature students. Self-directed individual or informal learning is often referred to as lifelong learning. Non-formal education may also be called lifelong learning, but labels for it include continuing education, in-service training, human resources development, open learning, professional development, distance education or simply adult education.

Adult education at UW is almost entirely formal, though a small amount of non-formal education is also available from our faculty (continuing education programs and off-campus public lecture series in libraries, for example). We do not offer open learning in the formal mode, as even our part-time mature students must pass some admission procedures, designed to select those we judge capable of benefitting from university-level studies. Distance education (our Correspondence Program) is regarded here as merely an alternative medium by which we can deliver the same kinds of formal educational experiences as we do on campus. Professional development involves most of us here, if at all, as learners rather than teachers (workshops offered by teaching resource personnel or seminars and scholarly lectures, for example).

There is general agreement that the goals of all adult learning fall into three (not fully distinct) groups: education for the undereducated (the functionally illiterate, learning disabled, immigrant or other groups whose education is inadequate for fully independent functioning in our complex and demanding society); education for career competency, development or change (a largely economic view of educational needs); and education for leisure and personal enrichment (often earlier associated with non-employed spouses or the retired worker, but increasingly today with stress management or simply with a change of pace similar to that provided by sports, exercise or other more traditional recreational activities).

Whichever of these goals we are working towards--and here at UW it is the latter two--it helps us as teachers to be aware of a number of characteristics common to most adult learners and generally agreed upon by the educational experts.

These characteristics produce the following profile of typical adult learners:

- *their range of learning ability will be wide, probably wider than among the young learners (Rogers, 1986)
- *their life experience (from which they draw much of their sense of self-identity) is also very wide, although they may lack experience or practice in academic activities (Thorpe, 1987)
- *their adulthood continues to develop, manifesting itself through increasing independence, maturity and self-directedness (Knowles, 1979)
- *their involvement with new sources of learning is generally voluntary, so that strong motivation must be maintained. External rewards (money, promotion, accreditation) may be effective but are generally less powerful than internal ones: self-esteem and open recognition of competence by peers
- *their need for autonomy and self-directedness may conflict with the insecurity of 'not knowing the right answers' or the unfamiliar sensation of dependence on someone who is seen to be an expert (Knowles, 1984)
- *their learning styles may be very different, with distinct preferences for certain approaches to learning (Verduin, 1986), but adults can and do also utilise many different resources if these are made available

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- their perceived need to know as a rule precedes their decision and readiness to undertake new learning
- their learning is usually life-centred or problem-centred rather than discipline- or subject-oriented. Relevance to their perceived needs may be important, and so may early and frequent feedback on progress
- their lives are filled with conflicting demands, with those of their profession or job and of their families being regarded as more important than their own needs and interests in most cases. Since their learning is 'for the self' and voluntary it must often give way to more urgent calls upon their energies. (This does *not* mean, incidentally, that they regard their learning activity as trivial or unimportant, but rather that their sacrifices in postponing or giving it up are all the more painful)
- their speed of learning and perhaps their memory and their problem-solving abilities may decline somewhat, particularly in older adulthood. However, their wisdom, which is the product of their intelligence acted upon by years of life experience, can compensate in many cases for some deterioration in learning skills
- their willingness to submit themselves to unfamiliar or long-forgotten kinds of activity and environment, especially ones which make them feel insecure, threatened or inadequate is a gesture of interpersonal trust that must always be responded to with respect and sensitivity. Many adults have developed self-protectiveness to a high art by simply avoiding the activities they know will undermine their self-confidence. They deserve to emerge with their dignity and self-worth undamaged and enhanced.

What do all these characteristics of the adult learner mean for our roles as course author and tutor? Unfortunately the old-style 'teacher,' 'instructor' or 'professor' is too often only superficially replaced by the jargonous new-style 'facilitator', 'helper', 'educator', 'content expert' or 'resource person'. Whichever term we prefer (and here I'm using 'tutor' for our traditional direct interactions with our adult students, the 'learners'), some of our responsibilities emerge most powerfully:

- we should help our adult learners to define and clarify the values and goals important to them (Verduin, 1986)
- we should be prepared to maintain our learners' motivation especially in the crucial 'induction phase' (the first few days or weeks of the course). Encouragement, recognition of significant difficulties overcome, acknowledgment of the learner's worth are vital (Thorpe, 1987)
- we should provide as varied materials as we can, offering the learners guideposts and alternative routes through the new knowledge. Wherever we can we should enable the learners to make their own choices, to draw upon their own experiences and to develop self-directedness and independence
- we should expect a wide range of learning abilities and styles, responding to these by providing not only variety but extensive support when it is needed. Helping with study skills may be part of our responsibilities to some, while challenging the most competent students to move ahead still farther may be even tougher for us
- we should be supportive, open, authentic, human, collaborative, trusting and empathetic--even if we cannot and should not be perfect (Knowles, 1984)
- we should work towards changing our traditional roles as experts in our disciplines into new ones as tutors of our peers and towards guiding our learners into greater and greater independence of us. Perhaps the family is *not* the "only social institution designed, when working efficiently, to self-destruct": the adult education class has something of the same quality to it!
- we should try to make the learning experiences relevant to our learners' needs, problem-centred whenever possible, tailored for the wise and the experienced in life who may also be a little slower and a little less memory-skilled than the younger students
- we should be prepared to respect the learner's right to put our course to one side when other priorities in his or her life make themselves felt. Physics, linguistics or logic are certainly important, but we should accept other adults' value-scales when sick children, demanding employers or deprived spouses take precedence over our assignments. We are not here to judge or to denigrate, but to enjoy the privilege of helping fellow human beings learn what they choose and what they can.

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The Role of the Correspondence Tutor

Paper 46

Friendly tutoring is important and need not conflict with academic standards.

> The courses helped me to plan more efficiently and read more critically—the biggest help has been to give me confidence to work well, on my own. So—many thanks
> (Freda)

The NEC system: the tutor as friend

The National Extension College (NEC) does all that it can to encourage tutors and students to communicate across a distance. Firstly, a student cannot be expected to write warmly to a 'college' or to an unknown, unnamed tutor. So as he enrols each student is sent a personal biography of his tutor. A typical biography is reproduced below:

Your tutor for How to Write Essays/The Arts—A Fresh Approach/Wordpower is:

> Mrs. Elizabeth Maynard,
>
> 4 Abbots Way,
>
> Muncaster,
>
> York. Y03 9LB
>
> Liz Maynard obtained a degree in Sociology from the University of York in 1967, and in 1968 obtained a further degree in Sociology from the same place. At the same time she acquired a husband, who is now a lecturer in Economics, also at York. Three children then followed, which ensured that most activities are home based and that most of her time is taken up with fighting back the sea of toys, sand and old socks which daily threatens to engulf them! However, she has also been a tutor counsellor for the Open University Foundation Course in Social Science since 1971, and as a result has become very interested in the whole field of Adult Education.
>
> Mrs. Donkin aged 40, a Staff Nurse, married to an accountant; 4 children all younger than 16. Hobbies: wine and beer making (and drinking). Reading. Music (Beatles to Bach). Motor cycling. Animal keeping—3 cats, 1 dog, 6 rabbits, 1 guinea pig, 1 fish, 6 chinchillas, 12 ducks. Yoga. Swimming—in winter. Gardening—in summer. Looking after two old ladies referred to as Mrs. C. and Mrs. D.

At the same time, the student is asked to fill in a 'personal details form' and to send this to the tutor. The form includes space for the student to give his reasons for studying by correspondence, his aspirations and his likely study problems. These forms usually produce rich information:

The tutor will generally write a friendly introduction letter to the student and this kind of contact will continue between assignments. Marked assignments will include questions back to the student, to try to create a written dialogue. Many tutors encourage students to comment on how they *feel* about the work and about studying at a distance. Students generally gain confidence and with the help of tutorial prodding gradually engage in dialogue, often enclosing quite lengthy letters with their assignments:

> I hope the visit to Dortmund was a success....I quite agree with your comments about structure and was aware of the essay's deficiencies when I sent it off. I knew I had the material, it was the ordering of it and using it to its best advantage—which needed more uninterrupted time than I ever had....
> (Margaret)

At NEC in monitoring our part-time tutors' work we look for evidence of personal comment not specifically related to the detail of the assignment along with the more usual criteria of speed of return of script, fullness of teaching comment, tone of comment and explanation of any grade awarded. When recruiting tutors we seek out those candidates who might be expected to deal sympathetically and warmly with students at a distance and we are currently preparing a tape and booklet to encourage tutors to extend this aspect of their work.

This excursion into NEC's view of the tutor's role makes clear the priorities:

1. The tutor is very much more than a 'script marker'. Scripts and related letters are a lifeline for the distant student and in his written comment the tutor is communicating with, supporting and motivating the learner, as well as assessing the work.
2. Tutor-student communication is person-person communication as well. Tutors have as much to learn as students; genuine interest in what he has to say (not just about the course material) shows the student that his experience is respected. Aware of the problem of student 'drop out' the tutor creates for the student the supportive context more usually associated with the informally run conventional class.

The tutor as teacher

The tutor has a crucial role since only he can easily relate the fixed standard product (the course) to the individual student. (Each student is different and students' needs often change as the course progresses.) The tutor acts as a consultant to the student:

> You mention my work being a bit awkward and disjointed at times. Is this the construction of the sentences, or of the structure of the essay as a whole?
>
> (Paul to Tutor)

> The main problem is the structure of the essay as a whole. You tend to jumble ideas together instead of separating them out to deal with them in clear sections. I suggest a way of doing this at the end of your essay. Have a look, too, at the ideas in Unit 4 Part 3.
>
> (Tutor to Paul)

Such comment can be very time-consuming. And all the time the tutor works towards the situation in which the student can do without him—i.e., can become an independent learner (though still, hopefully, a friend).

Conclusion

I have outlined two major parts of the role of the correspondence tutor:

- tutor as friend
- tutor as teacher, assessor.

Some readers may wonder whether the general emphasis on friendliness may lessen the discipline and integrity of the learning experience. I should like to end by showing that, in my view, there is no incompatibility at all between friendliness and the successful attainment of the objectives of academic courses. First of all, there is evidence that without friendly accessibility, a tutor may never receive any work from his student and will thus be unable to assume his teaching role:

> I took ages over my first assignment. I felt I couldn't bother a senior academic with high standards with work that was at such a basic level.
>
> (Ron)

> I was embarrassed a woman of my age. I felt my tutor would wonder why I hadn't got 'O' level years ago.
>
> (Veronica)

Secondly, friendliness and discussion of matters other than the narrowly academic will make it more likely that the student will connect course content with his own experience; this is an important learning objective for many courses. Thirdly, it is perfectly possible to comment on inadequacies in a student's work in a friendly and supportive way:

> I try hard never to be utterly negative: there is usually something one can find to praise before suggesting other things could have been improved.
>
> (History Tutor)

The following example shows this in action. The tutor is not only evaluating his student's work (mentioning strengths as well as weaknesses) he is also communicating enjoyment at having read it. These are in the best sense 'friendly' comments.

> In spite of your pessimistic tone in your letter this was a very good experimental effort. You got some positive results—even if you plot all the results on the graph you will see a relationship—well done. You also got some negative results but even these are important as they still give you information.
>
> Your write-up was chatty and understandable but not in the scientific method. You will have help now with your OU write-up for the moon experiment. Try to separate title, theory, method, results and conclusion; each section is restricted to that particular topic. You had a good basis here but you must practise writing a structured account. This is not as difficult as it seems so don't despair about it. Handling of experimental data from the OU is a great help. Your experimental ideas were very good indeed so be encouraged by that. I disagree with your letter—you show excellent potential as a scientist but need help in the special way we do our writing up.
>
> Good luck in the OU.

Postscript

> Thanks so much for your help. I throughly enjoyed the course. I know I have not sent in the completed exercise or form this time. However my excuses are—I have been doing it at very odd moments, son home ill awhile, running a one-woman doll factory and am going abroad on Monday for Christmas. I know I've learned a lot and it really opened up a new world for me. Thank you and a Merry Christmas.
>
> (Alison)

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Counselling by correspondence in distance education

Despite all the emphasis on new technology in distance education, I still find myself counselling by the oldest means of non-verbal communication known to humanity – the letter. I take some comfort from the fact that such a tradition goes back at least to St Paul, but I worry about the theoretical and practical issues involved when trying to respond to letters like the one below.

> Dear Mrs Jackson
> I'm sorry to have to write to tell you that I must desert the ranks of Erudition College.
> Until I started the course, I had not realised the extent to which my brain had 'seized up'.
> I imagine, in view of my performance on that first essay, you won't be too sorry to see me go!
> Yours sincerely
> Ted Matthews

I often avoid writing by using the telephone. But that is not always possible (particularly for counsellors in the Third World), and sometimes I notice that I have actually chosen to write – possibly for reasons not unlike those which determined the above correspondent's choice of medium.

Yet there appears to be very little written about what constitutes effective counselling by correspondence: there are no books like the volumes written on face-to-face counselling; there are no courses like the Open University's telephone counselling pack *On the Line*.[1] This becomes more urgent when it is remembered that much counselling by correspondence – especially information and advisory issues – is carried out not by counsellors but by administrators, clerks and secretaries. That is not to say that it is done badly, but it does suggest that counsellors ought to be thinking about the theoretical underpinning and skills development that would be needed to help colleagues to fulfil the task as effectively as possible.

Counsellors' views on correspondence counselling

Last year, a colleague (Derek Spruce, OU South Region) and I ran two sessions on the subject of correspondence counselling at the International Council for Distance Education/Open University Conference on *Counselling in Distance Education* and at the Open University Senior Counsellors' Conference.

Part of the two sessions involved participants in working through specimen letters from students (including the above example) and assessing specimen replies to them from distance educators studying the module on *Counselling* in the Association of European Correspondence Schools (AECS) Diploma in Distance Education.

The participants represented a wide variety of backgrounds and experience from around the world and within the OU. Yet, in the discussion, there was broad agreement about the issues involved in counselling by correspondence in distance education. For instance, they felt that:

- Counselling by correspondence can be effective, despite the very substantial contradiction that the extended clarifying dialogue associated with conventional counselling is seldom possible. Clearly, correspondence counselling is most useful for giving relatively simple information and advice. Nevertheless, useful things can still be achieved even where the problems presented are difficult and likely to need lengthy resolution. And, in any case, counsellors do not always have the choice: it may be correspondence or nothing.
- There are many other disadvantages of correspondence counselling apart from the difficulty of extended dialogue. For instance, there is the slowness of response, the difficulty of analysing what a partly literate student is saying, the need to avoid prejudices about handwriting, spelling and lay-out, and so on.

Yet there are advantages too:

- it is apparently easier for students (and sometimes counsellors) to communicate certain kinds of feelings in writing, particularly negative feelings such as hostility, anxiety and a sense of failure. (I have noticed that students informing me about their withdrawal almost invariably do so in writing.);
- it is possible to read the initial letter carefully, without the need to make an immediate response – a luxury denied to the face-to-face counsellor;
- it is possible for counsellors to draft and re-draft their responses – something else it is difficult to do face-to-face;
- the student can re-read the response and, if necessary, keep it for reference.

So, if counselling by correspondence is possible, and in particular circumstances may even have some advantages over other kinds of counselling, what are the characteristics of good correspondence counselling? What skills are involved? Again there was surprisingly broad agreement amongst conference participants that 'counselling letters' should be:

- written in a friendly, relaxed style, giving the impression that the counsellor welcomes the correspondence;
- non-judgemental, avoiding direct criticism of a student's behaviour or attitudes;
- informal and non-authoritarian;
- perceptive and responsive in some way to the principal feelings and emotional concerns expressed in the student's letter;
- well organised, responding to all the student's enquiries, however periphrastically expressed.

- open-ended, not necessarily offering cut-and-dried solutions, but allowing the student to think through the answers for him/herself

These are apparently relatively simple precepts, although it is much more difficult than it appears to put them into practice, as is illustrated later. It is interesting too that these precepts correspond closely to the essentially 'Rogerian' ideas underlying face-to-face counselling – namely (following the above order)

- non-possessive warmth
- acceptance – the absence of criticism
- genuineness – the counsellor as a genuine, open and undefended individual
- accurate empathy – awareness of the student's feelings
- and, in the last two cases, the equivalent of active listening

So, apparently, some agreement on the principles underlying correspondence counselling does exist, but translating these principles into effective and practical guidelines for a book or course is a challenging task. There might well be a market for such a course. The popularity of correspondence counselling can be gauged from the floods of letters received by popular magazines; evidently such correspondence does fulfil a real and deep need for help. Also, there may well be other organisations – public and private – which find themselves corresponding over matters which are less harrowing but still need a sensitive and effective response.

Other correspondence counselling methods

The direct exchange of letters is not the only way that correspondence counselling occurs. At least four other kinds of correspondence material exist.

• *Self-assessment correspondence counselling (SACC)*
This rather cumbersome term describes a range of interactive texts, the aim of which is to encourage students to reflect on their feelings, motives and experiences in the hope of clarifying them. Such texts contain, for example, open-ended questions, charts for completion, examples of other students' experiences and feelings, and 'contractual' material.

SACC materials are widely used in distance education, particularly for developmental counselling issues, such as entry and exit counselling. In the author's own OU Region, a SACC text for entering students – *Taking Off* – is complemented by another for withdrawing students – *Bailing Out* (cf Gaskell et al, 1988).[2] Other institutions have similar texts – for instance, *Open Choices* from the Open College, *A Package of Shoelaces* from Athabasca University in Canada and *Is zelfstudie via de Open Universiteit iets voor mij?* from the Dutch OU.

As always in counselling, such materials are difficult to evaluate. A survey of applicants who had received *Taking Off* in this Region produced a variety of comments, but most indicated that some clarification of motives and feelings had occurred, eg 'it played a considerable part in causing me to decline', 'Taking *Off* was the thing that convinced me it wasn't on', 'it pin-pointed things I'd been thinking about', 'the questionnaire brought the difficulties into focus'. Some 11 out of 16 interviewees responded positively, the rest neutrally.

Unhappily, the development of SACC texts in the OU has been vitiated by the first such text produced in quantity – the *First Year Student Handbook*, designed for new students. This met with considerable academic opposition on the grounds that discussing possible problem areas would actually cause unnecessary anxiety – an accusation for which no evidence was ever found. However, a more potent criticism was largely true – that the text was too substantial and arrived too late in the students' progress and thus was largely irrelevant to their perceived needs.

So, to some extent, SACC texts fell into disfavour in the OU, a situation from which they are, perhaps, only just recovering.

• *Experiential correspondence counselling (ECC)*
This term describes written materials which aim to help students to clarify issues and choices by allowing them to experience various aspects of the student situation.

The simplest example of ECC material is the *Taster Packs* (cf Adams *et al* 1988)[3] used in this Region to assist students in deciding about their initial course choice. Each Pack consists of a short excerpt from a Foundation course, together with a student assignment, tutor comments on that assignment and an examination question. A student working through a Pack thus has a brief (about one hour) experience of what it is like to study by correspondence which should be more realistic than reading descriptions in prospectuses.

The *Taster Packs* are currently only being piloted, but student feedback so far is encouraging: eg 'the Pack was of great help in removing my initial fears about course content', 'having read packs for both courses, I have decided my first choice was correct', 'it was sufficiently interesting to give me a feeling of excitement and enthusiasm for the course', 'it certainly helped confirm my choice of study'.

A follow-up study should demonstrate whether this kind of course choice counselling is effective and will be reported on in due course.

• *Straight text*
There is a wide range of ordinary non-interactive, non-experiential counselling texts in use in distance education for specific purposes. For instance, in this OU Region, the simplest example is *Getting Through*, a text aimed at students who experience severe anxiety about examinations. Other texts currently in preparation will cover areas such as study and assessment difficulties, and dealing with examination failure.

Once again, such texts are hard to appraise, though experience suggests that they tend to be less helpful than interactive or experiential materials for dealing with counselling issues.

• *The problem page*
Any distance education institution which has some regular student newsletter has the possibility of instituting a 'problem page' which deals with students' educational difficulties in the way made famous (and occasionally notorious) by popular magazines. As far as I know, this approach has not been used in distance education so we do not know if students would utilise such a facility and whether other readers would find it useful.

However, an interesting variation of the idea, which may be piloted shortly in the OU student newspaper *Sesame*, is the 'problem shared page'. Students are invited to write in about their concerns – about examination anxiety, for example; the letters are published, anonymously if preferred, and readers are invited to re-

spond with their own experiences, ideas and solutions. Such a format is appealing because of the 'self-help' traditions of distance education.

A short activity

This article has only scraped the surface of a complex and developing topic, and, in the end, counselling is about doing rather than theorising. So, in conclusion, readers may like to look at part of the exercise undertaken by counsellors at the conferences mentioned earlier. It relates to the student's letter included in the introduction to this article. In the Appendix are:

- *A student counsellor's reply*
  – an attempt at answering the student's letter, together with her comments on why she wrote in the way she did.
- *Tutor's comments*
  – the course tutor's comments on the student counsellor's work.
- *Tutor's specimen reply*
  – the tutor's own specimen answer to the student's letter.

Could you, the reader, do better? The author would be interested in hearing from you, since, whatever technical advances are made, we shall be counselling by correspondence for years to come – whether students are 'taking off', 'bailing out' or trying to deal with all that comes between.

Ormond Simpson
Senior Counsellor
Open University – East Anglian Region.

References

1 *On the Line. Counselling and Teaching by Telephone* (PS19), The Open University Centre for Continuing Education.
2 Gaskell, A., Gibbons, S. and Simpson, O. (1988) *Taking Off and Bailing Out – Self-assessment Correspondence Counselling for OU Applicants and Withdrawing Students.* Report No. 4 in the OU East Anglian Regional Research Survey and Project Reports.
3 Adams, C., Rand, V. and Simpson, O. (1988) *The Taster Pack Project.* Report No. 2 in the OU East Anglian Regional Research Survey and Project Reports.

Appendix

- *A student counsellor's reply*

Dear Ted Matthews
Thank you for your letter telling me about your decision to drop out of the course. (1)
I was sorry to hear this, as I feel that it is too early in the course to make such a decision. Your first essay is really no indication of how you will manage with the rest of the course. You simply have not yet settled into an effective method of study particularly suited to you. You might find that this takes time, as good study methods are often achieved by trial and error. But when this happens, you will realise that your brain hasn't seized up at all, and you will be happier and more confident with the course. (2) (3)

I found that your first essay was interesting enough, and it showed ability, but you didn't really answer the question. This suggests that it perhaps wasn't really clear in your own mind exactly what the question was asking. You need, therefore, to find out now why this was the case. There may be any number of reasons, but I can discuss this with you best if you let me know how you tackle your assignments; we might then agree on one or two techniques to make your study methods more effective. (4) (5)

Please write to me again soon, either a letter or an assignment. I should be very sorry to see you go so early in the course, especially as I feel that you have ability. (6)
Good luck!
Yours sincerely

Comments
(1) I acknowledge his decision to drop out of the course.
(2) I am honest about my feeling that his decision is a hasty one.
(3) I offer him reassurance by showing him that more or less every student has to experiment with study techniques before finding suitable ones.
(4) I try to encourage the student to analyse the root causes of the problem.
(5) and I offer practical help on how to set about this.
(6) I try to encourage him to contact me again.

- *Tutor's comments*

This letter is a good example of the old (and insoluble?) problem of honesty versus criticism. You want to communicate the feeling that the student is giving up too soon, but without being too critical so that the communication is rejected. I wonder if there was another way of giving that message – 'I can't help feeling that you're not giving yourself a fair chance by withdrawal at this stage' or something like that. Have a look at my specimen answer for a suggestion about another way of doing it.

But otherwise your letter was splendid, with plenty of practical help and encouragement.

- *Tutor's specimen reply*

Dear Ted
I was very sorry to hear that you feel that you should withdraw from the College. I think that many people get the feeling that their brains have 'seized up' when studying again; indeed I feel it myself whenever starting on new courses! But, although your first essay had to be a fail, it was (as I said at the time) very largely because you didn't answer the question set. In my experience, this often occurs in the early stages of a course for various reasons – usually nothing to do with academic ability – such as uncertainty in interpreting the questions and anxiety about the course in general. Once these problems are solved (and I would be pleased to try to help you), then with your undoubted ability you would have a real chance of success in the course.

Would you like to think it over and give it another try? If, as a result, you still feel that the right thing to do is to withdraw, then I do understand and sympathise but hope that you will try again at some other time – if not with us, then on some other course.
All good wishes
Elizabeth Jackson

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

From Cheryl K. Cranley, Guidelines for Creating and Supervising Distance Education Courses. Centre for Continuing Education and Part-time Studies, Laurentian University, Sudbury, 1986, pp. 31-34. Reprinted with permission.

COMMUNICATING BY PHONE

The value of maintaining contact by phone is generally recognized by participants in distance education. In many institutions, telephone communication is considered fundamental to the success of distance learning, and supervisors are expected to initiate contact at regular periods throughout the course. Some institutions require telephone contact every two weeks--to monitor progress and to provide advice, encouragement and motivation. Others insist that as well as contacting individual students when problems arise in graded assignments, supervisors should call all students at least at the beginning of the course, midway through, and a short time before the final examination.

Most of us would agree that supervisors' responsibilities extend beyond criticizing and grading assignments. But we must wonder about how much responsibility students are taking for their own learning if they must be reminded of the strength of their motivation every two weeks. Furthermore, in institutions where most course supervisors are full-time academics, such frequent telephoning is simply not feasible. How much contact, then, should supervisors initiate by phone?

The importance of the initial call has already been discussed. It serves to let students know that you are willing to provide assistance if and when they need it. They are also assured of your willingness to help in the course manual, and further encouragement to contact you by phone can be offered in your written comments on their assignments. While it is up to you to make students aware of your positive attitude towards phone contact, once you have done this in your initial call and in writing, perhaps the responsibility for keeping in touch should usually be left to them.

However, a few circumstances may prompt you to give students a call.

If they have not done well on a particular assignment, you should call to discuss the problems and to let them know they were not alone in experiencing difficulties. If you allow students to redo assignments, you may find it easier to offer guidance for resubmissions by phone rather than in writing. Calling also gives you a chance to cushion the disappointment caused by a failing grade and to provide personal encouragement to continue in spite of infrequent setbacks.

You might also want to call students whose work is overdue. These students may be questioning their ability to succeed--perhaps because of a low grade. A few words of encouragement may be all they need to renew their enthusiasm for completing the course.

It might also be a good idea to call students who are doing exceptionally well in the course. Lacking the opportunity to compare their grades with others in the course, they may not realize the extent to which their work suggests an unusual aptitude for performing in the discipline. Pointing this out may help students make more informed decisions when selecting future courses. Granted, your written comments on assignments will identify the strengths in their work, but taking the time to call and let students know their efforts and abilities are appreciated will likely mean much more.

For the most part, telephone techniques are a matter of common sense and courtesy. But since handling students' questions and complaints is an important part of your role as course supervisor, a few skills of effective communication are worth noting.

- Listen. Give students a chance to explain what they don't understand. Encourage them to articulate the problem. Avoid the temptation to interrupt. If they don't seem to understand exactly what the problem is, guide them by asking probing questions. Listen for word clues that suggest misunderstandings or uncertainties as they explore the problem. Let them do most of the talking.

- Once they have identified what they don't understand, paraphrase what they have said, just to make sure you know exactly what the problem is.

- When students express uncertainties or ask questions, help them formulate their own answers. Encourage them to think the problem through with you. Ask open-ended questions that point to a logical sequence of ideas and their implications. Suggest analogies the students will be able to identify with, and ask them for specific examples to illustrate their points. Be patient: give them time to think. Let the students break the pauses in the conversation.

- When they appear to have reached a solution to their problem, check to make sure their understanding is clear. Students may claim they understand simply because they think by this point in the conversation they should. Ask them to illustrate their understanding in their own words. If their explanation suggests gaps, uncertainties, or misconceptions, clarify these when their response is complete. Before ending the conversation, make sure you and the students are satisfied that their understanding is adequate.

- If the questions students ask are related to matters of peripheral interest, don't respond by claiming they "needn't bother trying to understand these concepts--especially because they won't be on the final exam." Let the students know these ideas are of secondary importance--to put their minds at ease--but deal with the questions briefly. In doing so, try to direct their attention to related matters of greater relevance.

- Once in a while, students will phone to complain about a grade. When they do, keep in mind that it may not have been easy for them to call. They may wonder if they have the right to question the grade, and they'll likely be concerned about how you'll react. Or they may be frustrated and angry when they call. Be polite, and try to put them at ease. Don't react in a way that will result in an unproductive exchange of ideas.

- Listen while the students communicate their dissatisfaction with the grade. Encourage them to explain why they think their mark should be higher. Then explain why you believe the grade is fair. Encourage them by suggesting ways to improve in the next assignment.

For many distance learners, knowing that you are just a phone call away, and that you will respond positively if they do call, is reassuring. Most students will not call--no matter how much you encourage contact. But those who do will benefit if you respond not only with academic advice but also with genuine interest that lets them know you care.

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The human dimension in Open University study

The Open University has developed an array of tutorial and advisory services for its students over 16 years. These have been reviewed regularly for their academic appropriateness and effectiveness. More recently, urgent reductions in services have taken place, in response to financial restraints. During 1985, Mary Thorpe and colleagues in the Student Research Centre, the Institute of Educational Technology conducted in-depth interviews with students and staff to explore their perceptions of studying with the Open University.

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We take it as axiomatic that it is our students' needs which must take priority ultimately, therefore that we should attend especially closely to their perceptions of what helps or hinders them in their studies. Accordingly, we are choosing here to focus on an area of consensus we have found among students we interviewed. This paper should also be read in conjunction with the paper which concentrates on the views of part-time staff (Student Research Centre in this issue of *Open Learning*).

Personal contact and studentship

We have been struck by the very great importance to students of feeling 'in touch with' the University, of making personal contact with its staff and students. For most of the students we interviewed, studying with the Open University has much greater significance than a process of mere credit accumulation and often represents a major development in their lives. Students see themselves as members of a university with a special character and significance. Many become intensely involved in an educational experience which affects not only their intellectual development, but perceptions of themselves, their jobs, their personal relationships and life goals.

At some level, usual anecdotal these wider kinds of impact of the University on its students are acknowledged. At another level, they often appear to be taken note of lightly, as if of secondary importance, tangential to the 'real' educational process. We would say, on the basis of this study, that this is to misunderstand the significance of students' personal involvement with the University, which affects their motivation and how effectively they study. Students' sense of being a member of 'a real university' (not a correspondence college), which makes personal contact with them in a variety of ways, is not just an enjoyable by-product of the educational process but intrinsic to it. Students are saying that without this human dimension they cannot study as effectively and some would probably not choose to study with us at all. For many, personal contact of some kind is the basis of their studentship.

We have found that the tutor/tutor-counsellor has a particularly important role in meeting students' need to be in touch with a university community. Their contact with tutors and, through tutors with other students, contrasts with the rest of course provision, prepared for students in general and inevitably more impersonal. (But students did praise the quality of course units, partly because, in being so student oriented, they do often make more personal contact than the traditional text book.)

Having a good tutor was seen by most interviewees as vitally important in helping them get the most out of a course and achieve a credit. Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) so often provide the backbone of their study and are the most important vehicle for feedback to the students on their progress and understanding. Tutorials were also commented on, and provided a significant opportunity for individuals to bolster their motivation and to tackle problems of understanding. It is at tutorials that a tutor is most accessible and most able to respond flexibly to students, establishing a relationship which often enables them to make the best use of 'distance media' (principally telephone and correspondence) the rest of the time.

We found the strongest concern among students about the prospect of further cuts in the area especially of contact with tutors and tutor-counsellors. A student studying for her third credit, for example, was asked how she would feel about having fewer tutorials.

Student:

'That's the worst thing they could do — that would kill it — where would you go for help if you can't go to your tutorial? You can ring him up but you get more out of going to the pub, discussing the tutorial . . . that tutorial is central to everything, it has a social and academic function, they are inter-linked — 1½ hours a month is not a lot compared with college — how can you cut down on that? On my course he rushes through, he's so good, I can unravel it then, it's like knitting.'

Interviewer:

'If it's so little, how can you miss it?'

Student:

'It's like posts and you fill in the wire netting. The posts are there and he provides them. It is directing. If I hadn't been to that tutorial I wouldn't know what the hell they were talking about. Tutors explain what the course is aiming at. Without the tutorial the units are just a foreign

language. It gives you the key and no more — you can't in 1½ hours. He unlocks it. If there were no more tutorials I would give it up now — I couldn't understand it.'
(Social Science Student—School Teacher)

Tuition and effective study

From these and a number of similar remarks and accounts from students, it appears that tutors have a key function for students as interpreters of the meaning of the course and of what is required in its assessment. The interpretive role seems to play a crucial part in student learning, especially when it occurs through dialogue with other students. Dialogue enables students to find out what is required of them in a way not fulfilled by study guides or assignment guides. Students describe tutorials as helping them see the 'wood from the trees' in the course material and how to tackle different subject areas.

One student, for example, explained how he had sorted out difficulties in adapting to a Systems course, after having taken the Social Science foundation course:

> 'I'd missed the tutorials from moving house — I'd not got the necessary base to start on from missing tutorials — so my first two essays, which I thought were the best I'd ever done, got poor marks — I was getting really demoralised. I'd phoned the tutor twice, he was never in. I wrote to him, no response. In the end I phoned the counsellor and explained things. Eventually the tutor phone and resolved the problems.'

The same student commented on the summer school associated with the courses:

> 'I found the Systems Summer School very useful as it was the first time I'd met any tutor and we had a good session and sorted it out and my grades improved. I know what he wanted. I knew what the course wanted — it was a different approach to writing a general type of essay, it was using a systems approach, using diagrams, notes etc, to explain points ... if I had gone to those early tutorials I would have understood what was wanted.'

As with other course components, students' evaluations of tuition differ and individual reactions also change in response to the particular demands of different courses. One student for example, had found travel to tutorials so time-consuming on an earlier course that she felt the time was better spent on study at home. However, she went on to describe aspects of her current course where tutorials had a function she particularly valued:

> Interviewer:
> 'You can manage without tutorials?'
>
> Student:
> 'It's probably more important now. The tutorial missed was lab-work on action potential. I could have done with that experience. I understand the *theory* but I would remember it better if I had seen it done. I prefer not to miss any more.'
> (Science student—Qualified Nurse)

This student described herself earlier as 'a loner', someone who likes to sort things out for herself. Nonetheless, she had wanted someone to be available 'on the end of a phone or contactable if I was really stuck.'

Some students, however, valued discussion particularly, because it helped them develop a fuller understanding of the course. One student for example, found the change from a foundation course to a second level course presented new difficulties because of the reduced number of tutorials — one in May and the next in September. He was missing the contact he had had at foundation level and felt he would miss it even more at third level.

> 'I work very hard at maintaining contact among students — just for the pleasure of talking over a subject ... tutorial assistance is invaluable ...When you read something yourself you accept it — you challenge it more in a group. You get different responses and interpretations — yours may be wrong. The *range* of ideas and experiences is important. Discussion refreshes you and you can go back to study.'
> (Social Science student — Ex-Teacher, Policeman)

Other students also commented on the value of frequent tutorials in the foundation year and the role of the tutor-counsellor:

> 'When I started, I'll give the Open University its due — it was very very good for the foundation course. We had an early meeting with the tutor in November — then two weeks later again. Then through the course the tutorial group met (almost) every week ...coupled with the radio programmes which discussed TMA questions, it got you into a way of working and thinking.'

Even though most students do not use their counsellor regularly after the foundation year, the existence of a counselling service remains important and expresses the University's commitment to its students, views expressed in these comments from two students:

> 'I would like to know that there was a counsellor there all the time, so I could phone up whenever I wanted to. Whether it's only once or twice a year, it's having someone there if you wanted to.'

> 'One of the most impressive aspects of the Open University is how much they care about their students. Having tutor-counsellors is one of the ways in which they convey that care.'

Taken as a whole, these findings are especially significant because they add a qualitative dimension to quantitative findings which tend in the same direction, and are discussed below.

The extent to which tutor and tutorials are valued

The findings (Kelly, P. and Swift, B.)[2] of a 1983 course-based survey of post-foundation tuition established the key role of the tutor for the majority of Open University students. A random sample of students was taken (5,763) from those studying 24 courses (four from each faculty, with a mix of half and full-credit courses at second and third level). Sixty-seven per cent of respondents to the survey agreed with the statement:

'A good tutor can make a course, a poor tutor can spoil one'

and 68% with the view that

> 'If there was no provision for contact with a course tutor, the Open University would lack credibility as an academic institution.'
> (Appendix Table 1).

In response to the statement

> 'Apart from having my TMAs graded and commented on, I don't want or need any other contact with a tutor. . .'

over 75 per cent indicated they disagreed. Across the six faculties, the percentages ranged from 73 per cent to 82 per cent.

Similar proportions in the range 60 per cent to 70 per cent agreed with the statements:

> 'Some aspects of most courses can only be taught effectively on a face-to-face basis. . .'

> 'Without a course tutor there would be no-one in the Open University system to whom I could turn for help with study problems. . .'
> (Appendix Table 1).

Other areas of this survey confirmed that, despite difficulties in using study centres, there is still strong support for face-to-face tutorials. Thirty-nine per cent of all students said that they had needed more tutorials on post-foundation courses than were available, and over 40 per cent said that if the amount of tutor support were reduced, it would adversely affect their ability to cope with Open University studies (see Appendix Table 2). Since these students were reporting on their experience in studying in 1982 and earlier, we could reasonably expect these percentages to be higher were we to repeat the survey now, after the cuts of 1984 and 1985.

In January 1985, the Institute of Educational Technology mailed a Student Opinion Survey to a random sample of students who had gained two or more credits by Open University study. (2,228 students (84 per cent) responded to this survey, which will be repeated in 1986, to monitor relative changes in student experience). Some findings, covering students' experience of 1984, can be usefully reported in the light of the argument being developed here. There is more evidence for example of the particular importance of tuition. Over 70 per cent of respondents rated 'helpfulness of my tutor' as important/very important — a significantly higher rating than that given to 'level of tuition fees' and 'summer school fees' (see Appendix Table 3). Seventy-six per cent of respondents had attended at least one tutorial (80 per cent of those who passed their course(s)), 69 per cent had initiated phone contact with their tutor and 34 per cent with their counsellor, during 1984. Only 9 per cent of students attended neither tutorials, nor self-help meetings, nor contacted their tutor, nor contacted their counsellor.

The erosion of tuition

Respondents to the Student Opinion Survey were also asked to rank a number of factors according to whether they felt they had changed for the better or worse. Again tuition ranked very high (third) on this list, with 34 per cent of all students rating the number of tutorials on offer as having changed for the worse. Twenty-seven per cent also said contact with other students had changed for the worse, and 19 per cent that helpfulness of their tutor had worsened (see Appendix Table 4).

Tables 5 and 6 in the Appendix also show a high degree of student concern about fees, but there is an awareness in the University of the significance of this issue for students. We feel, however, that there is not a similar awareness of the level of concern among students about tuition.

In support of our findings here, we would finally draw attention to the evidence provided by open-ended responses to the Student Opinion Survey, where students were not influenced by the terms of the question to comment on one course component rather than another. We have analysed (Student Research Centre Report No. 02)[1] the open-ended responses of about one-third of the questionnaires and note than spontaneous comment about tutors/tutor-counsellors/tutorials provides the single largest category of response and was the subject which most occupied students. When asked what changes within the Open University had hindered them, well over one-third of the students mentioned the drop in tutorial provision and the inaccessible location of tutorials. Students in the higher level courses particularly complained of isolation and a good number of them called for more tutorials.

Tuition in perspective

We are aware that our argument in this paper could be misrepresented. We could be seen, for example, as making uncritical evaluations of the contribution of tutors and the necessity of tutorials. This is not our intention. Even less would we argue that the model of provision before the cuts represents an educational ideal to which we must return at all costs. We fully accept that, like every other area of individual effort in the University, the tutorial system has good and less good/much less good tutors practising within it. We are also aware that tutorials are an imperfect instrument, even at the best of times, because of their inaccessibility for quite large proportions of our students and the varying abilities of part-time staff to meet the range of needs of all the individuals who attend.

Furthermore, tuition is not the *only* means through which students keep in touch with and feel part of the the University. Over 15 years the University has developed a network of different forms of communication from which each individual can select those which suit his or her preferences and circumstances and thus build up a personal sense of what 'studying with the Open University' means. And, as much as we would like to discover *general* rules about the effectiveness of different media and course designs, our strong impression is that there is so much variation in what affects students and what they choose to make use of, that such generalisations are suspect. Some extol Summer School for example, while others reject it or have been disappointed; some do value TV while others hardly watch at all.

We are not, therefore, implying that tuition is somehow sacred or that the contribution of part-time tutors should not be carefully examined. What we are saying is that **the human dimension of students' experience of studying with the University is crucially important,** fostering a sense of identity with the University, the opposite of which might be alienation from the University. We have discovered that students speak very directly about their need for high quality personal contact and of the central role tuition has within a network of communications, through which they achieve their own form of 'connectedness' to the

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University. We do not conclude, however, that other elements and other media making up the network are unimportant or can be lightly discarded, and we comment on the implications of this in our conclusions.

Conclusions

We do not feel that the evidence we have thus far justifies an 'alarmist' reaction. Ninety-four per cent of our respondents to the 1985 Student Opinion Survey agreed with the statement 'I would recommend the Open University to other people'. Most students are not as yet reporting a major change for the worse in their experience of study (though they are doing so in relation to fee levels). This should reassure us, particularly since our official policy has been to seek to protect students as far as is possible from the effects of the cuts.

However, in answering most of the questions in the Student Opinion Survey, students were reflecting on several years (at least three years) study with the Open University, for many of them, years in which the full richness of our provision for students was on offer. And we have found evidence from a significant proportion of respondents of changes for the worse in areas of the University's provision which they value highly for learning. Already over a third of our students perceive the number of tutorials on offer to have changed for the worse by 1984, in spite of our efforts to protect them. 26 per cent of our survey respondents had little feeling of belonging to the Open University and 47 per cent did not feel that they had received a lot of help from their tutor in 1984.

Our concern in reporting these and other findings in the paper, is to alert the University to two things: firstly, the possibility of mismatches in the perceptions of staff and students of the value of different forms of communication, and secondly to draw attention to the fact that tuition (tutors, TMAs and tutor/student contact) has a particularly important role and is being progressively undermined by cuts.

The University's full-time staff may understandably regard the variety of media and course components they have developed principally as devices to promote cognitive mastery of subject material. Some may be thought more effective than others, some made mandatory and others offered on a voluntary basis. For students, however, these different media and course components also represent opportunities for effective participation in a university, they become symbols of membership of an intellectual and social community, as well as a means to the end of credit achievement.

The importance of what we are saying for policy is this: in our need to find savings, we may start to value only those parts of our provision which seem to us (as full-time staff) essential for achieving a course credit. If this leads us to cut primarily all those components and features we might be tempted to label 'voluntary' or 'optional' extras, we will thereby offer a much less rich network of opportunities for involvement in the University and therefore for effective study with the University. The implication is that if we reduce the range of educational experiences we offer students, we disappoint and disadvantage a proportion of them.

Doubtless a counter argument is that, if we are forced to make large financial savings, then this is a situation we all have to accept, however regrettable. But there are dangers for the University in this situation and we conclude by drawing attention to those which are particularly indicated by the research findings we have discussed above:

- First, by progressively paring down the educational experience we offer, we run the risk of destroying the basis of enthusiasm of most of our students and not just a small minority.
- Secondly, the reduction of opportunities for inter-personal academic contact leads not only to a more limited service, but to a service whose overall effectiveness and purpose has been undermined. In some cases for instance, the number of tutorials is already so low that tutors and students question the value of what remains. There may be a threshold in the provision of tuition beyond which more cuts lead not just to a further stage in the reduction of provision, but to the collapse of the system as a whole. Were this to happen, we feel that the effects for our students would be very serious indeed.

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Correspondence Program
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3G1
(519) 888-4050

Teaching Resources and Continuing Education

University of Waterloo
Correspondence Courses - Fact Sheet

Courses:
- 4 courses offered in 1968
- more than 325 courses offered in 1989/90
- all courses are degree-credit courses, approved by Senate and similar in content to on-campus courses
- degree programs available in Arts, Environmental Studies, Mathematics and Science
- undergraduate level courses are available in all six faculties
- UW is one of the largest institutions in North America offering credit courses by correspondence
- tuition fees are the same as on-campus - $170 per course

Enrollment
- Fall 1988 5529 students enrolled in 7267 courses
- Winter 1989 5647 students enrolled in 7436 courses
- Spring 1989 3321 students enrolled in 4346 courses
- student population in all provinces and territories with the majority (77%) in Ontario
- 60% of students are enrolled in degree programs
- 47% of students are returning students
- 68% of students are enrolled in the Faculty of Arts
- 17,000 applications processed in 1987/88

Format
- typical course materials include 20 forty-minute lectures presented on audio cassettes accompanied by printed notes and textbooks. In some cases there are additional components such as video tapes, rock sample kits, microscope slides, etc.
- each course has up to 6 assignments due at 2 week intervals
- exams are written at 110 exam centres across the country or under the supervision of individual proctors
- courses are reviewed every 4 years
- all course material is copyrighted

Operations

Course Materials

Tape Screening & Duplication	• tape inventory includes approximately 200,000 tapes with about 90,000 new tapes being produced (duplicated and quality checked) each year • technical support services includes 3 full time technicians and approximately $150,000 in equipment
Notes & other Components	• approximately 26 ,000 sets of notes duplicated annually with an average of 125 pages per set • copyright clearance is obtained on all printed material, video, and music used in courses
Textbooks	• 25,000 textbooks ordered annually • inventory peaks at about $1 million
Mailing	• 43,000 packages of notes/tapes and textbooks annually; overall postage budget $230,000

Courses Operation

Assignments	• average of 5 assignments per course • 75,000 - 80,000 pieces of assignment - related mail processed annually
Examinations	• scheduling and arrangements made for 8,000 exams per term • majority of examinations written at 110 exam centres; approximately 1200 written under individual proctors
Evaluation	• all courses are evaluated each term by the students

Oct 1989

University of Waterloo

Teaching Resources and Continuing Education (TRACE)

Introduction
The Teaching Resource and Continuing Education (TRACE) office represents an amalgamation of several areas of the university which are dedicated to serving the needs of the non-traditional university student.

Teaching Resources is one area which historically dealt with the product of the institution; that is, the quality of the academic courses themselves. Continuing Education includes all the different aspects of adult and part-time learning: degree credit courses by correspondence, non-credit special topic courses, services and counselling for part-time students, and community outreach programs of public lectures and off-campus courses.

Teaching Resource Office
The Teaching Resource staff act as teaching consultants to all UW faculties. They assists individual faculty members, especially new ones, in improving their teaching performance, offering departments information on teaching methods and evaluation of learning, as well as keeping the university community informed about developments and innovations relevant to teaching and learning in higher education.

In addition to advice to individual faculty, the TRO provides resource material in a variety of forms and media. They offer workshops and seminars as required on specific topics, e.g. teaching in discussion groups or by correspondence. They produce an instructional and distance education newsletter and other brochures related to instructional resources. The office also has responsibility for administering the Distinguished Teaching Award program, established in 1975.

Distance Education at the University of Waterloo
Correspondence courses provide quality university-level education to approximately 6,000 students per term. There are some 300 individual courses in 50 different subject areas offered each year. Four degrees can be obtained entirely through correspondence study: a general BA (with one of 11 majors or non-major); an Honours BA (Classical Studies); a Bachelor of Science (general); an Honours BSc Program One (Non-specialized); a Bachelor of Environmental Studies (Geography), and a general Bachelor of Mathematics degree.

UW's program is one of North America's largest distance education systems. A typical course package consists of an album of recorded lectures on audio cassette tapes, printed material such as notes, charts, diagrams, assigned problems, or essay topics to be completed by the student, study aids such as rock samples or microscope slides, and videotapes. Correspondence courses are available in Fall, Winter and Spring terms: there are prescribed dates for assignments and a final examination. The final examination is written at over 100 examination centres across Canada or under the supervision of a proctor.

Opportunities for part-time studies on campus
Although a significant majority (nearly 85%) of UW's part-time students pursue their studies using correspondence courses, considerable numbers are able to attend classes on campus. Many classes are conveniently scheduled during one evening a week for the benefit of those students who work the average business day. But it should be stressed that daytime classes are also open to part-timers.

Many of UW's part-time students are 25 years of age or older, and they constitute a growing percentage of the undergraduate population. To assist adults returning to formal education, the Coordinator for Mature Student Services provides a variety of services throughout the year. These include general counselling, a career lecture series, social events, study skills workshops, learning skill packages, a buddy system, a newsletter, and a course information file.

Continuing Education (non-credit)
TRACE also manages continuing, non-credit, education. Over the last few years, short courses such as "Understanding Microcomputers", "Starting Your Own Business", and "We'll Show You How!" – the last a course to help students develop university level skills – have met the specialized needs of the general public as well as those of UW's students.

Several professional organizations encourage their members to use UW courses to achieve their designations. As well, certificate programs incorporating UW courses exist for occupational health nurses and land surveyors. TRACE works with the School of Urban and Regional Planning and the Department of Kinesiology in the provision of continuing professional education for practitioners.

Community Outreach
UW offers some of its credit courses in the communities of Kitchener-Waterloo and others in Southwestern Ontario including Cambridge, Stratford, Palmerston and Simcoe. These courses serve a two-fold purpose: degree students may find it more convenient not to travel to campus to attend class, and members of the public may attend them free of charge as a series of public lectures. Many people begin their academic careers by attending one of these classes for interest's sake, taking one course for credit, and then going on to earn a degree as they gain confidence and knowledge through the many support systems available to adult students. In addition, senior citizen groups in Erin and Cambridge and the Kitchener Public Library have all been the scene of popular non-credit public lecture series organized by TRACE.

Publications available

Several publications are produced annually for those interested in part-time degree studies, whatever the mode of study: the Correspondence Calendar; the Part-Time Studies Calendar which lists late afternoon and evening courses that are updated each term; off-campus courses brochures for each term and special brochures for each non-credit course offered. *The UW Correspondent* is a quarterly publication containing articles of interest to correspondence students, including letters and books for sale. The Mature Student Services Coordinator produces a general brochure listing those services and resources available through her office. The monthly newsletter contains people news, announcements concerning academic matters, and other items of interest to mature students.

The office distributes instructional information through two publications: *Distance Teaching News*, a newsletter for correspondence instructors at the University of Waterloo, and *Instuctional Development*, a newsletter outlining instructional development issues and advancements at UW.

For copies of any of these publications, please call TRACE at (519) 888-4050 or 888-4002.

Correspondence Office Organization Chart

Vice-President Academic

C.K. Knapper, Director
Teaching Resources and
Continuing Education

Vice-President University Services

C.T. Boyes
Registrar

B.A. Lumsden (2024)
Assoc.Director for Distance Education
Associate Registrar, Part-time Studies

Avril McVicar (2002)
Administrative Assistant
(Publications/Budget)

Pat Feder (2025)
Department Secretary

Gordon V. Ambrose (3075)
Manager, Student Services

Don L. Kasta (2003)
Manager, Continuing Education
Liaison Services

- General student inquiries
- Part-time credit courses
  - on campus
  - off campus
- Continuing education non-credit courses
- Public lecture series
- Regional networks
- Advertising/Marketing

Jennifer O'Rourke (2410)
Manager, Course
Development Services

Admissions/Registrations

Sharon Gibson (6091)
Supervisor

Judy Bonnell (4022)
Asssistant Supervisor

Laurie Hanley (4022)
Senior Admissions Clerk

Karen Ball-Pyatt (4022)
Admissions Clerk

Debbie House (4022)
Admissions Clerk

Vickie Lawrence (4022)
Admissions Clerk

Shirley Wells (4022)
Admissions Clerk

Nancy Brown (4022)
Admissions Clerk

Examinations and Assignments

Meredith McGinnis (4046)
Supervisor

Doris Barrie (4046)
Assistant Supervisor

Maggie Bruce (4035)
Assignment Clerk

Susan Porter (4035)
Assignment Clerk

Barb Tracey-Poll (4035)
Assignment Clerk

Sheila Kielbasa
Office Clerk

Reception/Mail

Maureen Jones (6034)
Administrative Assistant

Sue Haché (4050)
Senior Mail Clerk/Receptionist

Diane Black (4050)
Receptionist

Vacancy (4050)
Receptionist

Course Materials
(copyright clearance
textbooks ordering
course notes assembly)

Vacancy (3952)
Course Materials
Coordinator

Diane Foreman (3953)
Assistant Course Materials
Coordinator

Technical Staff

Vacancy (2827)
Senior Technician

Vladimir Mracna (2827)
Technician

Duplication
(Course materials, notes,
tapes, supplementary aids)

Cindy Rempel (4014)
Supervisor

Hanne Gendron (4014)
Assistant Supervisor

Marie Bartlett (4014)
Duplication Clerk

Carol Embro (4014)
Duplication Clerk

Rhea Hayes (4014)
Duplication Clerk

Janet Strickler (4014)
Duplication Clerk

Distribution
(Delivery and inventory
of course materials)

Irene Dawson (6038)
Supervisor

Scott Murie (2763)
Assistant Supervisor

Laurie Miller (2763)
Distribution Clerk

Important Dates to Remember

Activity	Fall Term 1989	Winter Term 1990	Spring Term 1990
Application Deadline			
New Students	August 4, 1989	October 13, 1989	February 9, 1990
Returning Students	August 18, 1989	October 27, 1989	February 23, 1990
Course Change Deadline	September 8, 1989	December 8, 1989	March 30, 1990
Last Date to Return Texts	November 1, 1989	February 21, 1990	May 30, 1990
Drop/Withdrawal Deadline (Without academic penalty)	January 3, 1990	April 18, 1990	July 25, 1990
Fee Reassessment for Course Drops			
No Charge	Before Nov. 1, 1989	Before Feb. 22, 1990	Before May 31, 1990
50 % Tuition	Nov. 2 - 30, 1989	Feb. 23- Mar. 23, 1990	June 1 - 29, 1990
100% Tuition	December 1, 1989	March 24, 1990	June 30, 1990
Fee Reassessment for Withdrawals			
No Charge	Before Aug. 4, 1989	Before Oct. 13, 1989	Before Feb. 9, 1990
$10.00 Fee	Aug. 5 - Nov. 1, 1989	Oct. 14 - Feb. 22, 1990	Feb. 10 - May 31, 1990
50 % Tuition	Nov. 2 - 30, 1989	Feb. 23- Mar. 23, 1990	June 1 - 29, 1990
100% Tuition	December 1, 1989	March 24, 1990	June 30, 1990
Assignment Due Dates			
Time Slot 1	October 18, 1989	February 7, 1990	May 16, 1990
Time Slot 2	November 1, 1989	February 21, 1990	May 30, 1990
Time Slot 3	November 16, 1989	March 7, 1990	June 13, 1990
Time Slot 4	November 29, 1989	March 21, 1990	June 27, 1990
Time Slot 5	December 13, 1989	April 4, 1990	July 11, 1990
Time Slot 6	January 3, 1990	April 18, 1990	July 25, 1990
Examination Dates	January 27, 1990	May 5, 1990	August 11, 1990
Exam Marks Processing			
Papers forwarded to Profs	Week of Feb. 5/90	Week of May 14/90	Week of Aug. 20/90
Marks sent to Registrar	February 23, 1990	June 1, 1990	September 4, 1990
Mark Reports Mailed Out	Week of Mar. 12/90	Week of June 18/90	Week of Sept. 17/90
Last Date to Return Tapes, Videos, etc.	March 30, 1990	July 6, 1990	October 12, 1990

Correspondence Open House - September 29 - 30, 1989

Taken from Read This First

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Professors, Markers, Tutors -- Correspondence Courses

FROM: Meredith McGinnis. Correspondence Program

SUBJECT: Marking of Assignments -- Fall 1989

DATE: September 1989

The following is our internal office schedule for handling assignments in the 1989 Fall term.

TIME SLOT	DUE DATE	ASSIGNMENTS SENT TO YOU FOR MARKING	MARKED ASSIGNMENTS RETURNED TO THE CORRESPONDENCE OFFICE	MARKED ASSIGNMENTS RETURNED TO THE STUDENT BY THE CORRESPONDENCE OFFICE
1.	Oct. 18, 1989	Oct. 23, 1989	Oct. 30, 1989	Nov. 1, 1989
2.	Nov. 1, 1989	Nov. 6, 1989	Nov. 13, 1989	Nov. 15, 1989
3.	Nov. 16, 1989	Nov. 21, 1989	Nov. 28, 1989	Nov. 30, 1989
4.	Nov. 29, 1989	Dec. 4, 1989	Dec. 11, 1989	Dec. 13, 1989
5.	Dec. 13, 1989	Dec. 18, 1989	Jan. 2, 1990	Jan. 4, 1990
6.	Jan. 3, 1990	Jan. 8, 1990	Jan. 15, 1990	Jan. 17, 1990

****** FINAL EXAMINATION ********** JANUARY 27, 1990

The assignment due date carries along with it a three (business) day period of grace to compensate for mailing delays. If you wish to receive a particular set of assignments earlier than indicated, please contact your assignment clerk -- Susan Porter , extension 4035. Our location is Annex 2, 156 Columbia Street.

It is important to mark assignments as quickly as possible and return them along with your comments, model solutions and/or tutorial tapes. Students are anxious to obtain feedback on their progress and do not understand delays when they do occur. Please note that students do not receive the marked time slot 6 assignment before the final examination.

At the beginning of the term, you will receive an assignment control sheet listing all of the students in your course. This class list will assist you in keeping track of the assignment marks. At the end of the term, we will send you a copy of our control sheet (with assignment grades) so that you may verify your records.

If you require further information, please contact your assignment clerk at ext. 4035, or myself at extension 4046.

09 MAY 19

CORRESPONDENCE OFFICE ASSIGNMENT CONTROL

COURSE: P 1101 T SB905 TERM: B905 FACULTY: ARTS MARKERS:

PROFESSOR: [illegible] EXT. [illegible]

STUDENT NAME		ID	1	2	3	4	5	●	EXAM	FINAL
A AN		B 707822								
ALL	J	89901 2	N 30	N 26	N 32	I✓ 29	I 38	N		C-
AL N	S	87 8005	N 28	I 20	I 25	I✓ 24	N 29	I✓		C-
AL S	L	8690 45	N 29	N 38	I✓ 32	I✓ 36	I 39	N		A
AL RE	E	899 085	N 36	N 32	I✓ 26	I 28	N 30	N		B+
ARC U	E	B 01652	N 34	N 24	N 27	N 32	I✓ 33	N		C
A OLD	A	89902 0	N 37	N 33	N 30	I✓ 38	N 35	N		B+
AUD Y	L	899 701	N 33	N 29	I 30	I✓ 30	N 30	N		C-
A ER	M	899024	N 40	I✓ 32	N 36	I✓ 35	N 36	N		A
BA ET	S	902912	N 27	N 31	N 33	I✓ 26	N 33	I✓		C+
BE L	J	8990 58	N 30	N 24	I✓ 30	I✓ 33	N 26	I✓		D+
BE T THER	P	711273	N 32	N 27	N 33	I✓ 33	N 39	N		A
DATE RND. TO PROFESSOR:			MAY 24	JUNE 7	21/6	JUNE 5	JUNE 11			
DATE RET'D TO STUDENT:			MAY 31	JUNE 19	30/6 27/6	[illegible]	JUNE 25			
TOTAL MARKS POSSIBLE:			40	40	40	40	40			
MATERIAL RET'D WITH ASSIGN.			TUT + SOL	—	-	—	—			

APPENDIX B.2.

Correspondence Program
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3G1
(519) 888-4050

Teaching Resources and Continuing Education

January 19, 1990

Dear Correspondence Student:

Every term we evaluate the correspondence courses, and we ask you to help us assess the course you have just completed by filling out the evaluation form on the reverse side of this letter. Your appraisal of the course and your comments are invaluable in providing information about the effectiveness of our program and can be used as the basis for changes in course content and organization.

The evaluation results go directly to the instructor concerned (but not until after all examination marks have been submitted to the Registrar's Office), and to the dean of the faculty concerned. We should stress, however, that the purpose of the evaluation is to provide a general overview of how successful a course has been from the point of view of the students: evaluations are not the best means for raising specific concerns or complaints about a course. If you have a concern that requires personal attention, you should direct it in the first instance to the course instructor, and if this proves unsatisfactory, take the matter up with the chairman of the department concerned or the dean of the faculty.

At the same time, the more general information provided by the evaluation forms is extremely helpful, and we urge you to return the questionnaire in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by March 23, 1990 at the latest. **Results of the evaluation are valid only if a majority of students respond, and so we are dependent on your cooperation.** You will remain anonymous, (the code on the label which reads FC0989 refers to fall course - 1989 and in no way identifies the student), so please do not put your name on the questionnaire.

Thank you very much for taking the time to help us with this evaluation. I hope your experience with this course and the program in general has been both useful and enjoyable, and that the program is allowing you to meet your educational goals.

Sincerely,

B. A. Lumsden
Associate Director
for Distance Education

Correspondence Program
Course Evaluation

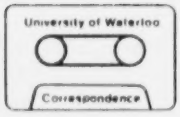
Directions: Please rate the items listed below on the scale A, B, C, D, E.

	Rating Scale (Excellent → Poor)				
	A	B	C	D	E
1. How would you rate the course as a whole?					
2. How would you rate the textbook(s) used in the course?					
3. How would you rate the course notes?					
4. How would you rate the taped lectures?					
5. How helpful were the comments on the assignments?					
6. How helpful were the tutorial tapes in giving comments on the assignments? (If no tutorial tapes were provided, leave this section blank.)					
7. To what extent did this course enhance your ability to think independently?					

No form can ever ask all the right questions. Please comment below on the matters we haven't asked about. Was there something you especially liked about the course? Was there something you especially disliked? What improvements can we make? If space is not sufficient please attach a separate sheet.

'Correspondence Paper'

Recently the Correspondence Office has moved toward desk-top publishing. So specially prepared 'correspondence paper', as it used to be called, is less in evidence. However, it is still available for handwritten or typed tutorial materials, from the Course Materials Co-ordinator in the Correspondence Office. Its heading looks like this:



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and it has a light blue graph paper grid (which does not show up when copied) to provide you with the correct size of writing field.

If you use plain paper for preparing tutorial materials, make sure to leave a 1-1/4 inch margin on both side of the sheet.

(The preprinted course notes are most likely to have a heading like this:)

SOC 256 LECTURE NOTES 1

Lecture Eighteen

MEMORANDUM

TO: Course Instructors, Correspondence Courses

FROM: Meredith McGinnis, Correspondence Program

SUBJECT: Correspondence Final Marks -- 1989 Fall Term

SUBJECT: February 6, 1990

Grade Reporting Lists have been sent to you or your department by the Registrar's Office. All grades must be submitted by **12:00 noon on Friday February 23, 1990.** The original copy must be **hand delivered** to the appropriate faculty in the Registrar's Office, one copy must be sent to the Correspondence Office and retain one copy for your departmental records.

The enclosed Assignment Control Sheet is being sent to you to assist you with your grade reporting. These lists are not revised to indicate drops or withdrawals, therefore the Grade Reporting List is the most up-to-date class list.

Please contact me if you require further information.

ext. 4046

encl.

A. 'BLUE CARD' (sent to students who do not submit the first assignment)

Dear Student:

We missed you... We are now returning the first marked assignments to your class for the course _____ and note that to date no assignment has been received from you. If you are having difficulty getting started a telephone call (519-885-1211) to your instructor could be beneficial. If your assignment is in the mail, or if you have submitted a drop/withdrawal request, please disregard this reminder.

If you do not intend to continue in this course, prompt action is required on your part to avoid academic penalty and minimize the financial penalty. For details please consult the current Correspondence Calendar or the "Read This First" information booklet which was enclosed with your course material. If we can help in any way please call.

Gordon V. Ambrose, Manager
Correspondence Student Services
Telephone (519)888-4050

B. Sample letter (sent with blue card, by instructor)

University of Waterloo

Feb 25/88

Just thought I'd add a note to ask whether you're still hoping to get started on Clas 384? If you think I can be of any help to you in tackling the first assignment, do feel free to give me a call. I'm usually in my office on Mon, Wed, Fri afternoons 2.30-4.30, and will be happy to talk to you about the course. So please, don't give up on the investment of your time so far, if you want to continue! Probably we can keep you going between us! Sally H.